

CLASS STRUGGLE

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**BUILD THE RANK AND
FILE MOVEMENT!**

**IRISH
WORKERS
GROUP**

PUT SINN FEIN TO TEST!

**THE
GENERAL
STRIKE**

**50
PENCE**

Class Struggle No.12

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Day by day even since it was written we see new proofs of the analysis argued by the IWG in this journal of the problems and tasks of LEADERSHIP for the class as a whole, for women and for the Six-County anti-Unionist revolt.

In the South, the dissipation for now of the tax protests and the cynical regroupment of the trade union leaders around their rump Labour Party to protect it from destruction by the anger of workers; the grinding down of union demands on public sector pay, the steady and unresisted preparation of more social spending cuts and new factory closures; the progress of the anti-woman Anti-Abortion Referendum and the cynical contempt of Fitzgerald, Noonan and O'Malley for the life of republican socialist Nicky Kelly - all are possible only because of the crisis of leadership within the working class movement itself.

This journal makes a two-fold contribution to the fight to address that crisis of leadership. It re-analyses the concrete needs and political obstacles in the struggles of the Irish working class and the oppressed at the present moment and thus explains the perspective and goals, the strategy and the major tactics vital for the class struggle against imperialist capitalism in Ireland to-day as a step to the Workers Republic and international socialism.

Secondly this journal presents in depth, in four articles, the major lessons of the working class tradition and of revolutionary Marxism on the General Strike tactic. This advanced method of working class struggle is made a vital necessity by definite political situations, especially by the centralised offensives now being stepped up by the ruling classes of Britain and Ireland against the working class and other oppressed sections.

The nature of the hunger strike protest taken up as a last resort by anti-imperialist Republican fighters for political status in 1980 (and again by Nicky Kelly) made the General Strike an urgent necessity - even though the IWG was alone in consistently fighting for the recognition of that necessity. The jailing of workers for their resistance to the bosses, as in

Ranks, and particular concrete demands of the class as a whole against the capitalist offensive - such as the tax equity struggle - equally pose the need for centralised class-wide action.

Against such assaults various strikes and movements will develop but they will all be weakened by isolation and sectionalism, by their diversion into stunts and limitation to moral protest by the class misleaders. They can be strengthened through the bringing of them together into a general strike. Revolutionary communists therefore fight to win a vanguard of militants to a recognition and preparedness for this tactic - openly arguing against false leaderships who may succeed in long delaying that recognition.

We do this by seeking forms of organisation that cross the sectionalism and divisions of the class and challenge the misleaders. We do it around slogans that prepare militants for the tasks ahead, that break the barriers between politics and economics and that, as Trotsky said, are "all hitting at the same point". We fight, most importantly, for mobilised preparedness to challenge the ruling class and imperialism for political power itself - for that is exactly the question most concretely posed by every General Strike.

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IN THIS ISSUE

PAGE 3 PUT SINN FEIN TO THE TEST IN STRUGGLE - INSIDE AND OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT -

PAGE 6 BUILD THE RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT AGAINST THE CAPITALIST OFFENSIVE!

- Limits of Trade Union Politics p.9
- Labour and the lessons of Reformism p.11
- Centrist obstacles to the fight for a revolutionary action programme, Militant, SWM, PD and LWR p.14
- Anti-Abortion Amendment p.19
- Nicky Kelly and the fight against Repression p.20

PAGE 21 A FIGHTING PROGRAMME AGAINST THE CAPITALIST OFFENSIVE - FOR WORKERS POWER!

PAGE 28 ROSA LUXEMBURG AND THE MASS STRIKE

PAGE 32 THE GENERAL STRIKE AND RUSSIA 1905

PAGE 36 THE GENERAL STRIKE 1926. BOSSSES SHOWDOWN - TUC'S BACKDOWN

PAGE 44 THE GENERAL STRIKE IN FRANCE, 1936-38

PAGE 49 REVIEW: "The Degenerated Revolution: The Origins and Nature of The Stalinist States".

PUT SINN FEIN TO THE TEST

of struggle inside and outside the imperial parliament

First the Prior Assembly Election and now the British General Election have hurled back the lie of the British Labour and Tory attempt to criminalise revolutionary nationalist fighters in the Six County statelet. And between the upper and nether millstones of Thatcher and the Provisionals, the collaborators of the so-called 'Social Democratic and Labour Party' are being steadily ground to pulp after ten years of their unchallenged claim to politically represent the anti-Unionist population.

Despite all the efforts of the Southern Bourgeoisie and the Catholic Church as a whole, despite the creation of the New Ireland Forum specially to bale out the SDLP, despite the banning of Republicans from the Republic's television and Radio, despite the orchestrated propaganda attacks casting the IRA in the role of criminals, despite their crooked polls, the Green Tories throughout the island have been doubly discredited by Sinn Fein's increasing command of the open political support of the Nationalist population - 13.5% against the SDLP's 17.9% after 10 years of the latter's unchallenged command of the nationalist 34% of the Six County electorate.

SINN FEIN NATIONALISM ROADBLOCK TO VICTORY

The refusal of Sinn Fein for so long to take to the polls its battle with the SDLP was the product of its moralistic nationalist tradition and perspectives. But the fact that it has now changed tack cannot for a moment be taken to mean that it has even begun, in any essentials, to abandon its petty-bourgeois outlook - which remains an umbilical cord to sections of the bourgeois ruling class - despite all its "socialist" talk.

The Irish Republican principle of refusing to take seats in post-Treaty parliaments and institutions, and their normal practice of abstention from elections, has on the political terrain left the struggle for the immediate needs of the masses open time and again to the constitutional nationalists. The latter have used the 'democratic legitimacy' confirmed by elections to repeatedly attack the revolutionary nationalists' struggle as undemocratic and illegitimate. In reply the Republican movement has only been able to point to the past - the historic Dail and a mystical national will expressed in a continuity of armed struggle as the source of legitimacy.

The desperate counter-attack of the Hunger Strikes against British criminalisation policy compelled Sinn Fein to take the battle onto the electoral terrain where first Bobby Sands and then Owen Carron won a House of Commons seat on an abstentionist basis. The mass sympathy for Sinn Fein, revitalised by the hunger strike campaign, compelled them to take advantage of the Assembly Elections if they were to find a political anchor for that support against the claims of the SDLP which was now especially discredited by its record of slavishness to British imperialism and exposed by Thatcher's uncompromising pursuit of a military solution and a new Protestant Unionist Ascendancy.

Thus the turn of the Republicans towards elections since Bobby Sands stood for MP was not a TACTIC with the aim of mobilising the independent fighting ability of the masses. INSTEAD, and especially after the Assembly elections it plunged into the most unashamed passive municipal electoralism and reformism - local grievance clinics, representation on housing, rents etc. with the aim of consolidating a formidable electoral machine. It was a method unable to equip the working class masses in general to face the social, political and economic offensives launched by London and Dublin. It could not give a fighting lead in practice to workers in the Health Strike, De Lorean etc. - not to speak of beginning to fight systematic repression.

The combining of electoralism with militarism was aimed at preserving the growing Republican claim to be the legitimate political representatives of the anti-unionist masses - with a mandate for only the single "strategy" of armed struggle - thus keeping their supporters politically PASSIVE. For Sinn Fein, politics is NOT, as it is for Marxists, the mobilisation of classes. Despite the growing and felt pressure on them of a working class crucified by both the economic and military offensive of imperialism, the adopting by their movement of a "socialist" direction has never gone beyond rhetoric. This was admitted in Derry by Gerry Adams at a May 9th Guildhall meeting of 300 on "Socialism And Ireland" where he summed up the problem of their "socialism" as having policies without the politics to make them concrete. In Dublin, at a debate in February with IWG and PD, Sinn Fein's Paddy Bolger admitted that Sinn Fein's socialism was not yet apparent but he was at pains to persuade his audience that it would become evident in time! North and South, faced with the most savage attacks on the working class and anti-unionist population, Sinn Fein's nationalism thus blinds it to the nature of the class crisis in Ireland. Adams gave proof of how Sinn Fein in the South espouses a minimal reformism:-

"Force is only legitimate in a situation of occupation." ... "The way Sinn Fein should be going in the 26 Counties is combining a correct attitude on the National Question and by doing the ground work the Workers Party have been doing" - Gerry Adams in the Sunday Tribune, 8/5/83.

THE PETTY BOURGEOIS CLASS NATURE OF REPUBLICANISM

It is no surprise that revolutionary nationalists, capable of the highest personal heroism among their militants and fighters, should display such political impotence. The class basis historically of their perspectives and programme is rooted in the petty bourgeoisie. That is what defines the movement and leadership, what makes any 'evolution' into revolutionary socialism impossible for Sinn Fein despite the immense pressures of the class needs of workers in the nationalist ghettos.

For, as a distinct class lacking a historic destiny of its own anywhere, the rural and urban petty bourgeoisie is fated to act politically in the interests of the bourgeoisie or else to cloak itself

verbally in the interests of the working class. Its outlook is thus typically unstable and vacillating.

To-day petty-bourgeois revolutionary nationalism in urban Ireland continues to reproduce methods equivalent to the old agrarian terror, but in an industrial urban society. Incapable of a scientific understanding of the world of capitalist imperialism, it is nevertheless compelled - by imperialist oppression of the nation and by the legacy of an aborted national revolution - to oppose Partition and the Northern sectarian state.

The tradition of Irish Republicanism has been able to renew its hold only by default of all the labour movement parties and leaderships whose bankrupt reformism puts them on the side of imperialism, and because of the absence of any revolutionary communist party. So, although the working class is the majority of those who see the Republican campaign as their defence against oppression within Imperialism's Orange State, nevertheless the Republican leadership and organisation continue to be defined in all essentials by a petty bourgeois perspective.

It opposes imperialism with physical force and with the aspiration for the ordered society of patriotic producers and co-operatives as the basis for economic justice - a petty-bourgeois aspiration on which the Sinn Fein lefts put the gloss of socialism - just as do the reformist petty-bourgeois leaderships of the reformist Labour parties. (No surprise that Ken Livingstone professed to be impressed with the 'policy' similarities to British Labour!)

This 'Eire Nua', economically independent DESPITE the overarching international division of labour that is actually the very pre-condition for socialist development, is not only utopian as a programme but reactionary. Repeated conference proposals within Sinn Fein for "economic" action have not been able to make it the least bit concrete as an answer to the needs of the working class in struggle.

Incapable of revolutionary politics which put to the fore the mobilised self-activity of the toiling classes, the Republican movement FEARS its own involvement in the political arena of bourgeois and imperialist political institutions. Its leaders know, and the whole history of their tradition reminds them of, the political insecurity of their own petty bourgeois outlook, how it is fated to either arouse the uncontrollable action of the masses for proletarian class goals or to adapt to the diplomacy, the wheeler-dealing and the compromises and treaties of the imperialists.

The nationalist moralism that has served to "justify" this position has often and for a long time proved its bankruptcy in the harshest way - including leaving the anti-unionist population easy prey to the most savage repression.

Thus, for the Republican movement the fight to mobilise anti-unionists against discrimination, for their civil rights, against day-to-day repression, for the abolition of emergency legislation and anti-democratic courts - for reforms of any kind - was always rejected by Republicans! Their dishonest excuse was that such demands would 'recognise' and make more acceptable the 'alien' institutions of Imperialist rule, would sow illusions in an irreformable system and corrupt the will of the people to directly oppose Partition and the Northern State.

TURNING ITS BACK ON THE CONCRETE NEEDS OF THE MASSES

But the real reason was Republicanism's REFUSAL to develop, not to speak of rely upon, the independent self-activity of the masses. It was rooted in their own FEAR of themselves once drawn into political action - the fear that their political bankruptcy as a petty-bourgeois leadership would mean capitulation to pro-imperialist "constitutional" methods. There is no other explanation for why the military wing dictated the limits of political debate in the movement, no other reason why the tactics of armed struggle were fetishised as a sacred "strategy" even at the price of pushing the masses again and again to the sidelines and into the arms of the SDLP who could thus claim a mandate to oppose the Republicans for ten years!

Revolutionary Marxism has NO such aversion from the fight for every immediate, partial and concrete reform towards satisfying the needs of the masses. Capitalist Imperialism and its crisis-ridden statelet in Ulster are incapable of yielding those reforms in any permanent or systematic way. We therefore fight to link those immediately felt needs to transitional forms of struggle - action goals which, when taken up and fought for, begin to mobilise the masses for the revolutionary overthrow of imperialist and capitalist rule. Thus the mobilisation of direct action and demonstrations, centred on organised working class industrial action, the building of democratic action councils and peoples militias in response to direct repression - all lead on step by step to putting the masses on the offensive against the system as a whole.

Faced with almost 25% unemployment and the worst economic misery in Western Europe, the workers of the Six Counties - both Protestant and Catholic - have been bereft of ANY leadership willing to put before them the kind of action goals around which to begin to fight back. For example, the elementary need of workers faced with massive industrial closures in the past 4 years was to occupy the plant, hold it to ransom and fight for class-wide solidarity throughout the North, the South and Britain to win nationalisation without compensation under workers control. For Sinn Fein such a perspective was ANATHEMA because their utopian nationalism portrayed it as consolidating the hold of Britain over a part of Ireland. In reality, however, the growth of such struggle - in the North, the South and in Britain - would have had the opposite effect; it would have begun to place powerful charges in the very foundations of imperialism and both of its statelets! It would have challenged the property of the British Ruling Class and Orange and Green capitalism. It would therefore have begun to challenge the very existence of those states. More, it would have given a powerful reason to Protestant workers to see the anti-imperialist struggle in a new and favourable light - from the point of view of their class interests as workers.

The Irish working class as a whole, the working class of the Six Counties, including the Protestant workers, and especially the anti-Unionist workers and communities NEED a fighting leadership capable and willing to use EVERY tactical means that can serve the struggle for all their immediate defensive needs, and which can go onto the offensive against the military, political and economic ravages of Imperialism. There is no basis WHATEVER in "principle" for refusing to use the platforms of the Prior Assembly and the House of Commons in that struggle.

O'Bradaigh
SF President
(left)
Bolger
(back)
and Adams
now M.P.
(right).



Forcing the Republicans to take their seats will put them to the sharpest test as the leaders - more and more the undivided leadership - of the anti-imperialist revolt of the Six County Minority. It is dishonest and hypocritical for Irish Republicanism, which, to protest at British occupation, has found no difficulty in justifying bombs in England, to put forward moralistic excuses for not exploding in the Imperial Parliament the vastly more powerful propaganda 'bomb' - by actively using Parliament and Assembly as platforms to win the widest possible focus, not for token statements but for a bold call to action to the entire proletariat of both islands! The claim that such participation would "legitimise" the institutions of imperialist rule is rubbish. It is nothing more than a confession, by those who make it, of their own inability and unwillingness to issue such a call to action!

We say to Sinn Fein and especially to its Lefts:-

* Take all the seats you win in the parliaments, assemblies or councils. Abstention is fake intransigence. Enter them to defend the national and working class interests you claim to stand for. Such actions, against the British, against the Loyalist bigots, will in themselves be a tremendous gain for the anti-imperialist struggle - EVEN among the protestant workers who will say:- the fighters against British Rule are defending our interests, our jobs, our trade unions against the onslaught of Thatcher, Tebbit, Prior and the bosses!

* If you democratically represent the nationalist masses, organise them democratically to fight! Elect independent councils of action based on real independent fighting organisations, workplace and trade-union based organisations, tenants committees, street committees. Councils of Action that will take up the fight against repression and also against unemployment, factory closures, social spending cuts, for women's liberation!

* Help create and train a mass people's militia - to defend the minority areas against the police, the British Army and pogromists - and where needed, to defend Protestant and Catholic workers in struggle from armed strike-breakers!

* Build a united front with socialists and militant trade unionists throughout the country united in direct ACTION - with freedom for all participants to openly argue their own programmes. Direct action against the pro-imperialist policies of the Southern bourgeoisie - repressive laws and courts, extra-territorial trials, police and army collaboration - AND against the austerity measures being imposed on the Irish working class as a whole.

* You do not trust yourselves to hold firm to the revolutionary character of your nationalist demands once you enter the parliaments of Imperialism. Because of the nature of your politics we do not trust you either. We fight openly to demand that you enter into no deals with British imperialism short of a complete, unconditional and immediate withdrawal of its troops from the Six Counties. With those who look to you for leadership we express our solidarity and call for united fighting action which will force on you the demands of the anti-Unionist population and the Irish working class as whole.

* Even if Sinn Fein refuses to take its seats it remains vulnerable to the test of action - increasingly so as it becomes the uncontested leadership of the anti-Unionist revolt. In fact a refusal to take its seats would increasingly expose its unwillingness to base its tactics on the needs of the masses for a mobilising action programme for their national and class needs.

In that struggle we believe the perspectives, the programme and the methods of class action put forward by revolutionary communists will prove their superiority and be the basis for winning the best fighters to the building of a revolutionary Trotskyist party. The major action goals and tasks that can be the basis for a fightback on all fronts against imperialist capitalism - and the tactics to smash the obstacles to that fight - are spelled out in this issue of class struggle. The IWG puts them forward, in comradely and frank debate, to the militants of the class and of the Republican movement, to all those who believe in the need to fight for working class power and the overthrow of capitalism and imperialism.

Concluded on p.43

COALITION AUSTERITY PROVOKES CLASS ANGER UNION LEADERS TRY TO CHOKE IT -

BUILD THE RANK&FILE MOVEMENT AGAINST THE CAPITALIST OFFENSIVE !

The week of May Day 1983 saw the International Monetary Fund demand more cuts in social spending by the massively indebted Republic of Ireland; workers marched in Dublin and 17 Waterford factories struck for relief from a crushing burden of taxes; the Finance Minister intervened to stop wage increases agreed with unions in the private insurance sector; the army was used to do the work of Castlebar hospital strikers; the latest of a chain of massive redundancies, AT&T International - totally unchallenged - closed production in Dublin after only a year with the net gain of millions in grants and tens of millions in State contracts; and Fine Gael leader Fitzgerald admitted the imminent attainment of 200,000 unemployed - officially 17% - with a promise of a lot more redundancies before the "world recovery" would be felt. Across the Border in the other Irish state - let 21% were officially jobless - 116,373 people. Fitzgerald's divided party in the same week allowed easy passage to the most reactionary Referendum bill ever seen in the Dail - subordinating the lives of women to the life of the foetus.

The Irish Ruling Class and The Economic Crisis

This was but the most recent picture of the deepening crisis faced by the Irish bourgeoisie. A decade ago it had appeared as if fifty years of semi-colonial backwardness was about to be put to retreat, paradoxically, on the basis of deeper penetration by transnational industrial capital which was expanding in a post-war world re-organised by U.S. Imperialism. For the first time since formal political independence and Partition in 1922 there had been an increase in the economically active population within the Southern state and a stemming of the massive haemorrhage of emigration. 'Structural' unemployment, however, at over 6% still remained twice as high in 1972 as in the home countries of imperialist capitalism which were making up to 30% profits on their Irish investments.

The world economic recessions beginning at the end of 1972 cut like a scythe through the remaining 'native' industrial base in Ireland - much of which in turn was still dependent upon or closely intertwined with British capital. Even the State owned

industrial enterprises began to fail in the battle with international capital. Only a very few native capitalists were in a position to step up accumulation on the basis of the shakeout, and these, like Smurfit, were compelled to diversify their holdings by buying into companies abroad as a condition of survival within international capitalism. Quite contrary to recent claims of self-styled 'Marxists' such as the SWM, this was in no way evidence of a burgeoning native Irish capitalist class crossing from the camp of the imperialised semi-colonies to the status of fellow imperialist of the US and EEC.

The EEC Common Agricultural Policy brought price increases to farmers but benefited large capitalist farmers disproportionately. Although significant sections of small farmers were driven from the land and massive state aid was made available for farm development, the predominance of small-scale uneconomic holdings remained an obstacle to any significant increase in agricultural productivity. The development of native food processing industry failed to keep pace with international competitors.

More than ever before, the ruling class in the South was compelled to step up its enticement of US and Japanese capital to the South to exploit plentiful trained labour, tax exemption for profits on exports, and tariff-free access to EEC markets. The doubled unemployment level of 1977 (120,000) had only been reduced to 90,000 by the time a temporary upswing had petered out in 1979 - despite the most rapid ever inflow of new foreign investment. But by now the Southern state had encountered a new consequence of its dependence on imperialist capitalism. To finance the necessary infrastructure of communications, education, training, development aid etc. for the 'development' by foreign capital, to provide unemployment and welfare benefits as the price of social peace in the face of rising expectations and to maintain rough parity between wages in the industrial sector and the greatly enlarged public sector, internal borrowing by the state had to be massively supplemented from outside.

By 1981 the foreign borrowing requirement for one year had risen to 12.8% of GNP and accumulated foreign loans per capita are now higher than Poland's. Taxation on workers wages and spending was

increased to meet interest payments; farmers, many sections of the wealthy and company profits escaped effective taxation.

Political Obstacles to

Ruling Class Offensive

The return to recession in 1979 signalled the need of the Irish bourgeoisie for a strategy to drive back the considerable gains of the organised trade union movement, reduce public spending, divert even more revenue to private capital accumulation, massively rationalise State enterprise and privatise profitable parts of it.

Politically, however, the parliamentary system, where over 80% of the seats are divided between two capitalist parties competing for the spoils of office for their separate networks of patronage and clientilism, delayed every attempt of the ruling class to systematically pursue its offensive. The opportunist populism and bogus republicanism of Haughey's Fianna Fail, coloured by his belief in imminent world economic recovery, resulted in concessions to working class pressure with a view to a favourable election outcome in 1981. Public sector wage increases were conceded. A measure of tax relief was provided. Some welfare benefits were kept in line with high inflation rates and Talbot workers who resisted redundancy to the point of a jail threat were guaranteed their incomes.

Class Struggle Nos. 10 and 11 analysed the conjuncture of economic crisis and resurgent struggle against British policy in the Six Counties that led to the parliamentary stalemate in the outcome of the June '81 election; and again the stalemated outcome of the Feb. '82 election due to a shift by class-conscious workers towards the 'left' claims of new 'socialist' independents. Fianna Fail was forced to vie with Fine Gael (and its Coalition partner, the bourgeois Labour Party) to prove their commitment to austerity policies to "rescue the country" for the bourgeoisie and their imperialist masters.

Concessions to the 'independent socialist' deputies who held the balance of power afforded only a temporary respite after June '81 when Sherlock of the 'Workers Party' and Kemmy voted a Fine-Gael Labour Coalition into Government, proving their treacherous commitment above all else to preserving the stability of existing institutions of bourgeois rule. Gregory and the 3 WP deputies voted Fianna Fail into power after Feb. '82, believing in Fianna Fail's greater 'pragmatism' as borne out, again, by tactical concessions - this time to impoverished city areas. The general instability and crisis of bourgeois political rule found its echoes within the Fianna Fail movement, wracking it over a series of scandals surrounding its leader and ministers and opening the way for a return of the Coalition in November 1982 when the nakedness of Fianna Fail's austerity programme drove the Workers Party to withdraw support from it.

Coalition Rescues Bourgeoisie

It was Labour's class collaboration in entering a new Coalition that gave the ruling class its most secure lease of political stability for four years, enabling it to pursue the new offensive opened up since December '82. That this was possible, yet again, despite the Coalition experiences of 1973-77 and 1981, is symptomatic of the profound crisis of

7

leadership in the Irish working class.

In this period of repeated government crises, WP and the independent "socialists" who held the balance of power inside the Dail, and the union bureaucracy outside, squandered every chance to begin to develop the basis for an independent political fight by the working class as a whole - because they knew that would mean the independent mobilisation of the rank and file for their demands outside as well as inside parliament.

THE WORKING CLASS RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS

The organised trade union movement grew rapidly throughout the 70s and repeatedly demonstrated its combativity in sectional warfare on the wages front despite the even greater growth of the officialdom that holds it back. The growth of co-ordinated wage offensives by workers at the end of the sixties was met by the union bureaucracy with the two tier picketing system which allows all unions not directly in dispute to order their members to pass the pickets of a striking union unless the ICTU is persuaded to issue the all-out picket.

In the sixties union officialdom aimed to contain rank and file sectional militancy by bureaucratic consolidation of the multiplicity of unions. In the seventies this gave way to a policy of exploiting the divisions among unions while imposing a tightly-policed and centralised 'orderly' process of wage bargaining through the class-collaboration of an Employer-Labour conference. Workplace democracy in the unions was systematically undermined. 'Unofficial' militancy was the response of workers to National Agreements which outlawed the right to strike over wages and became an instrument for effective wage cuts in terms of price rises. Collaboration in wage restraint was surpassed by the readiness of the bureaucracy to ensure 'order' in the process of redundancies that has tripled the level of unemployment in ten years from an already high starting point.

Beginnings of Class-Wide Revolt

Massive class-wide resistance was triggered in 1979 by the growing ravages of income taxation which was drawing in increasing numbers of lower paid workers but most sharply affected the higher paid and white-collar sections with whom the bureaucracy is most closely bound up in its personnel, outlook and basis. A fourteen-month period of repeated mass protests, with up to half a million stopping work to march on one day, ended with the action being called off in March 1980 by the ICTU who had commandeered the leadership from the Trades Councils and diverted the mass anger into class-collaboration in the form of a Tax Commission. In 1982 workers' anger against new PRSI levies on wages was again confined within the limits of token one-day protest by the union leaders. The ICTU was increasingly seen by workers as a traitor peddling concessions in tax allowances from the new Haughey Government to defuse the protests.

From a policy of concessions and the delusion of inducing 'boom and bloom' on the basis of 'confidence' in a recovery that never materialised, Haughey turned in mid-1982 to the 'Thatcherite' policies he had earlier decried. His smashing of the public-sector wage agreement brought nothing more than diplom-



April 16th Dublin Tax Equity demonstration.

atic footwork by the union leaders with the sole aim of preserving intact the bargaining procedures that guaranteed them their own privileges as brokers. In the words of Greg Maxwell of the ICTU Public Sector Committee: "certain principles were upheld which were more important in ways than the cash settlements agreed in the proposals. The industrial relations process will continue to operate and we have been assured that future settlements will be honoured." *I. Times* 5/10/82.

Fianna Fail outlined a series of swingeing cuts in public spending but it was not till the Coalition wrested political stability from the jaws of parliamentary stalemate in the November election that they could be implemented. Throughout the whole period until the Budget the union leaders stayed criminally silent, confining their 'response' to token press releases to be produced months later by John Carroll to 'rebut' the charge made by the bourgeoisie themselves that the unions had not objected to the Fianna Fail austerity proposals!

Budget Offensive

Four months of a day-by-day offensive by the ruling class and their new executive, the Coalition of Fine Gael and Labour, quickly provoked widespread anger throughout the working class. Cuts were decreed almost daily, many of them potential flashpoints for popular resentment such as putting schoolchildren off half-empty buses because they couldn't pay the new travel fees. The 1983 Budget then cut a wide range of social expenditures in health, education and local authority services; it increased PRSI wage deductions, offered no relief in tax-bands against inflation, slashed the one-year pay-related supplement to unemployment benefit from 40% of wages to a new ceiling of 25% and stepped up VAT rates by 5% to 23% and 35%. In effect it set out to reduce the Deficit

far below the level Labour had boasted it had set in the Coalition 'conditions'!

In this situation the anger of the organised working class as a whole could no longer be contained.

The open political and economic offensive on workers and their families on a national basis began to provoke the conscious need for a class-wide response. The opportunities that had briefly existed in the parliamentary stalemates to begin to establish a fighting independent political leadership had been squandered by class traitors who were bought out for loose change from the ruling class. But for local sections of the class even those concessions became by example a focus for redoubled struggle.

The Talbot workers had risked jail, faced down Haughey and kept their incomes whether or not there was work. The Clondalkin Paper Mills workers had used the sit-in in the favourable conditions of the repeated elections to commit Haughey to 'nationalisation' of their closed plant. When Fine Gael and Labour launched the Coalition budget offensive the bureaucracy in the person of FWUI's Attley threatened to break with Labour unless the State kept Clondalkin open. The Government bought the plant from the Company (which soon afterwards reported a return to profitability!). When Ranks workers' jobs in Dublin and Limerick were sold out by the ITGWU a determined fight by a tiny section of them turned the tide. Fighting merely for the better redundancy money recommended by the Labour Court, 14 were jailed for sitting-in at the Dublin mills. Their action spotlighted in the media, for the class as a whole, the legalised robbery involved in closures and the readiness of the state forces to defend it.

Even ITGWU boss Carroll was forced to threaten national strikes to secure their release. It was he

who had withdrawn official support from the Phibsboro' workers action and thus gave the green light to the police. Once the workers were released by the threat of exploding mass anger, however, the bureaucracy immediately withdrew all further support when the sit-in began again, this time - under mass pressure, putting the call for nationalisation to the fore. The action spread to the Limerick Ranks workers but the struggle remained isolated.

The Coalition Budget had the effect of sharply crystallising the developing consciousness among workers of the class-wide dimensions of the economic offensive. The bureaucracy sensed the massive pressure from below and moved swiftly to divert it into safe channels, hoping to exhaust it - again on the terrain of the tax question.

The "Lefts" in the trade union leadership, centred around Merrigan in the ATGWU, encouraged the Waterford workers to initiate a campaign of withholding taxes by clerical action to black wage deductions. It was a calculated gesture of protest and not a call that could begin to mobilise the force of class-wide action against the bosses' state. It was a

tactic that could not be generalised because it meant relying co-operation from managers and bosses. Waterford bosses collaborated in the scheme for two weeks but the Government and the Labour Party attacked the action as illegal and the Waterford bosses backed off. The ITGWU leaders called a half-day token protest stoppage to pre-empt any moves towards forms of direct action by workers.

Thus the working class turned out in huge numbers on April 13th but were openly cynical towards their leaders and convinced that marching would achieve nothing in itself. That it was an attempt by the bureaucracy to head off pressure was clear to rank and file militants in every section of the 100,000 mass that choked the 4-mile long route of the Dublin march and in the 20 other towns closed down by workers' demonstrations. The leaders had refused to mobilise direct action, strikes or sit-ins. Once more the Irish working class saw how its own sheer mass dominated Irish society, sensed its own collective willingness to fight but at the same time gave silent witness to its own paralysis as a class corralled by leaders unwilling to call them to real action.

LIMITS OF TRADE UNION POLITICS —THE BANKRUPTCY OF REFORMISM

The collaboration of the trade union leaders in defusing any confrontation with the capitalist system is rooted in the nature of trade unions themselves and the way they have been bureaucratised under imperialist capitalism. Trade unions are the spontaneous defence organisations of the working class within capitalism. In themselves they do not challenge the existence of capitalism - they are not spontaneously socialist in their outlook.

The system of capitalism makes human labour power a commodity with a value and a price which is paid as a wage to the worker. Wages are exchanged for labour power which is then exploited by the capitalist to create surplus value in UNPAID labour time - the source of the bosses' profits. This exchange of a commodity, labour power, for wages, is a universal feature of the capitalist market. Trade unions, therefore, are the organised expression of workers' attempt to get the best price for their labour power in the various sectors of production - workers' response to capitalist market conditions. Of themselves they aim to do no more than bargain within the limits of the capitalist "wage contract".

The rapid development of capitalism in Europe and the super-exploitation of its colonies created an accumulation of wealth which allowed the ruling class in the metropolitan countries to concede relative privileges to a minority in the working class - the skilled workers best placed in the market to demand the highest price for their labour. Such a layer of the class - the Labour Aristocracy - takes on the outlook and social aspirations of the petty bourgeoisie.

Their political outlook was defined by a confidence that their needs could be met within the capitalist system and its parliamentary institutions. Not only did the trade combinations of this developing aristocracy of labour define the method, traditions

and outlook of early trade unionism but their social privileges enabled them to dominate trade unionism in general as it developed to include the masses of workers at the turn of the century.

Roots of the Bureaucracy

Rooted in this Labour Aristocracy, therefore, there developed a powerful caste of officials - even in the general unions of the lower paid workers - who curbed and then strangled the vibrant militancy that had brought their organisations into being. Such is the history, for example, of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union; for even in imperialised colonies such as Ireland there also existed, however thinly, an aristocracy of labour and a tradition of trade unionism defined by it as part of the British and Irish trade union movement.

The periodic occurrence of crises throughout the history of capitalism, temporary collapses of investment, production and markets, crises that had to be solved at workers' expense, has tended to make the working class at large conscious of itself as an exploited class and conscious of the need to end this system. But the bureaucracy rooted in the labour aristocracy has been able to serve as the lieutenant of the ruling class within the class organisations of the workers. It has balanced upon and cultivated the divisions originated by capitalism itself within the class; it has separated the democratic process in unions from rank and file workplace control; it has swelled its own ranks with an army of employed and salaried functionaries unaccountable to the ranks of the workers but ever ready to wheel and deal on the bosses' terms. In short it has established for itself an INDEPENDENT role which can only preserve its respectability and its material privileges by monopoly of workers' bargaining with capitalism - within the limits of the capitalist wage contract - but simultaneously defusing and deflecting any tendency by the workers to confront and destabilise the social "order" enforced by Capitalist state power.

THE TRADE UNION PARTY

Politically, however, the aspirations of the class for a better life have demanded independent representation in a Party of their own. In constituting, therefore, a party of the organised working class movement, the trade unions dominated by the labour aristocracy and the bureaucracy rooted in it, have defined its programme within the perspective of REFORM of the capitalist system, a party expressing the world view of the labour aristocracy and confining itself within the limits of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. (In the European mass workers parties of the Second International, constituted under the lead of Marxists in late-developing capitalism especially in Germany, the influence of the labour aristocracy had the effect of a degeneration of those parties into labourite reformism. See Class Struggle No. 11 - Marx, Engels and the Mass Party in Germany.) Labourism, therefore, copperfastened the hold of the lieutenants of capitalism in the working class - economically and politically.

Its programme enshrined the separation of economic and political struggle and enabled the bureaucracy to deflect pressure for class-wide direct action against capitalism into parliamentary reformism. Its determination, in the last analysis, to preserve the system of bourgeois rule as the basis for the privileges of a labour and trade union bureaucracy compelled it to also deny workers' democracy within the Party. The conditions of Ireland have given a specific form and content to the Irish Labour Party and denied it any active mass membership, but in all essentials it expresses fully the limitations of the politics of trade unionism - i.e. a bankrupt reformism based on class collaboration and the preservation of the system of capitalist rule.

The trade union bureaucracy plays out its role as class traitor in every sphere of the economy and society, not simply in daily bargaining with separate employers but also in the commissions, authorities and councils of the bosses' state - Labour Court, Employer-Labour Conference, Prices Commission, on the boards of State companies etc. etc.; even in the Six-Counties RUC Police Authority. The Unions bind themselves to the condition of strict secrecy in those bodies - allowing the bourgeoisie to escape accountability for their plans and actions while lending them the symbols of working class approval in the person of union 'representatives'.

Class Collaboration

At every point they teach the workers to see their problems as capable of solution only through sacrifices to help solve their bosses' problems - by rationalisations and redundancies "to save the rest of the jobs"; by improved "competitiveness", import controls and Buy Irish campaigns to protect "Irish" industry instead of independent direct class action to defend workers' concrete needs. All these forms of collaboration are systematised in centralised agreements with the employers and the state.

But the crippling limits of such "trade union" politics are harshly exposed by the stepped up and centralised offensive of the bosses in the present crisis. The refusal of the bosses' state at the present time to countenance any systematic concessions in the form of centralised agreements forces the bureaucrats, in defence of their own role, to lean more and more on the threat of direct action by workers - carefully isolated section by section - as a bargaining counter with the bosses.

How, then, are they to retain CONTROL of the

- 10 organisations of the workers when the offensive of the bourgeoisie increasingly allows of only one response by workers - a class-wide mobilisation which must challenge capitalism itself?

Left Union Bureaucrats

In this situation the bureaucracy is forced more and more to allow its "Lefts" room to manoeuvre, to use rhetoric about confronting capitalism, in order to retain control of rank and file revolts and politically divert the class when the developing struggles threaten to throw up a new alternative leadership. The growth of the Workers Party, the union leaders' threat of disaffiliation from Labour and the calls for a new trade union party on "socialist" policies, Merrigan's "Alternative Economic Strategy" and his sponsoring of piecemeal rank and file strike action on the tax question are all accommodations to the demands of the working class which will allow the existing petty-bourgeois leaderships to contain independent workers' action.

Nowhere do any of the Lefts fundamentally break with the illusions of sectional syndicalism or the political perspectives of resolving the crisis within the capitalist system, i.e. reformism.

The April 13th Dublin demonstration at the GPO heard Merrigan call for a "political direction" for the protest. To a tumult of approval he called for consideration now of union disaffiliation from the renegade Labour Party that had sold them out. When he called for steps by the unions to set up a new mass labour party on "socialist" policies the cheers of the mass of workers rose and died away three times before he could continue. Cries of "No, no" interrupted him when he seemed to be calling for more one-day stoppages but his rhetorical flourish drew another mass cheer when he called for rolling strikes "leading to a General Strike". But Merrigan had not called out any indefinite or national stoppage of his own union - nor attempted it! He did not then or at any other time call for any of the methods of struggle or forms of organisation - under an elected and recallable leadership - that alone could make possible the successful fight for a General Strike to answer the bosses' offensive.

The clearest testimony that the labour and trade union "Lefts" have no intention of leading militants on such a road of struggle is their refusal to confront REFORMISM as it poses itself in its most concrete political form as an obstacle to workers - i.e. the Labour Party. Instead they have cloaked themselves in rhetorical anger about disaffiliation, syndicalist cancellation of political levies and electoral opportunism towards Labour. But they have refused to mobilise concrete action to force the Labour Party out of Coalition in order to open up the road of STRUGGLE in which parliament will be used to call for political and class-wide direct action, with the transitional goal of a genuine Workers' Government which will stand over every gain of the masses in struggle and arm them for the smashing of the bourgeois state. Such an orientation to the obstacle of the Labour Party is one vital tactic in an action programme for working class rule.

Without winning the best class fighters to see the need for such a tactic towards the Irish Labour Party, even though the struggle might in practice quickly bypass and shatter that Party, then no matter how heroic or militant they may be in action they will not yet have been broken from left-reformist political illusions to the conscious fight for a revolutionary socialist party.

LABOUR AND THE LESSONS OF REFORMISM



Matt Merrigan, ATGWU District Secretary.

Left-reformist union official Matt Merrigan has called for a new mass "socialist" labour party. The Centrists of Militant Tendency argue that the existing Labour Party can be transformed by a few hundred new activists joining it. The reformist Workers' Party believes the official political mantle of the movement will inevitably fall on its shoulders as Labour is more and more rejected. The Centrists of Peoples Democracy and the League for a Workers Republic make hollow calls for building a new mass party in the 'tradition of Connolly'. None of these would-be leaderships offers any concrete and explicit answers, however, to the question of what kind of party the working class needs. Nor do any of them in their tactics confront the obstacle of the Labour Party in such a way as to begin to clarify the answers to this question for the most class-conscious workers.

For, the Irish Labour Party IS a real political obstacle for the Irish working class. Not in the sense that the workers are looking with active illusions that it can be won to lead them; not in the sense that its present class-collaboration simply 'delays' the day when they will of 'necessity' turn in their tens of thousands to that Party - as Militant believe! It is an obstacle because it is the political instrument of the trade union bureaucracy with which they have, time after time, and will again as long as they can, divert the political aspirations and demands of the rank and file away from themselves. For it is in their hands that unaccountable control is asserted over the centralised and organised power of the class, and it is the political mobilisation of that power against the capitalist offensive that they seek most desperately to prevent.

Answering Carroll's Cop-Out

The role of the Labour Party as a cover for the bureaucracy's refusal to fight was starkly underlined by the patronising cynicism of one of the most despised union leaders, John Carroll, when he washed his

hands of any responsibility for real action against the budget offensive and Labour's class collaboration. He told the working class that THEY had voted in the parties who held power - so what did they expect in return if they didn't use the ballot box to support their own party!

Under such contemptible utterances lies the whole ugly reality of a Party whose treachery and consistent throttling of workers' democracy are primarily the responsibility of the trade union bureaucracy itself. Where have he and his cronies ever fought to bring that party under the control of the organised working class? Where have they ever stood over the fight for independent rank and file action and control in the labour and trade union movement? Carroll has no quarrel at all, in essence, with the reformist perspectives that reduce Labour, in the imperialised conditions of Ireland, to a deformed and stunted bourgeois party of the working class - no matter what changes might occur in its personnel!

Parliamentary Illusions

Despite its consistently minority support (now below 9%), despite the rhetorical anger of the bureaucrats themselves towards it in the present period, despite its never more than minor role in promoting "reforms", Labour has served the ruling class well as a lieutenant. Labour, as the official political voice of the organised workers' movement, has resiliently for 70 years served to define and confine the political expression of workers as an organised class within the fraudulent and impotent limits of a bourgeois parliamentary democracy in which 80% of all parliamentary seats have been monopolised for generations by two capitalist parties competing in corruption on behalf of their capitalist and petty-bourgeois backers while posing as "alternatives" to each other!

These parliamentary illusions subordinate any use by workers of their own class power to the maintenance of the bourgeois system itself - the dictatorship of the capitalists. And, at that, a pro-imperialist, semi-colonial, confessional and Partitionist system that denies, wherever it can, the very principle of bourgeois democratic rights.

The Question of Government

Politically strait-jacketed as an organised movement by that reformist world view in a society where imperialism has divided the working class by Partition and arrested its social and political development, Irish workers have been rendered prostrate on the most political of questions in their living experience - the question of Government. Coalitions, political bargaining and repeated support of capitalist governments by "their" representatives have been a decades-long school in class collaboration for the labour movement.

The result of this prostration has been to deepen the syndicalist hostility of even the most combative sections of the rank and file to the political questions raised by the class struggle itself - questions which in a period of capitalist offensive are the most PRACTICAL ones if the class is to break out of its historic impotence:- how to break the stranglehold of the Labour Party, what kind of party is needed, and to fight for what kind of Government! Without the answers to these burning issues the working class is fated to remain passive fodder for the populist reformism of the capitalist Fianna Fail movement.

The Key Question:— Programme

Nothing in the role of the Workers Party, now posing itself as a 'genuine' alternative, even begins to challenge that legacy. Likewise with the other "Left" independents. Likewise Merrigan's project for a new mass "socialist" Labour party, aided and abetted by the Centrists who hide behind VAGUE allusions to a Connolly tradition that is equally claimed by EVERY false leadership on the left, reformist, stalinist and republican.

At the heart of Merrigan's project for a "new" Labour party with "socialist" policies is a belief that new personnel and a new apparatus, and a more vigorous "left" parliamentary role can offer a genuine alternative to the existing Labour Party. But the treachery, the lust for the spoils of office, the corruption of the Labour deputies, the stunted, bureaucratic and Coalitionist nature of the Party are the inevitable outcome of its political reformism, its programmatic essence. Concretely these features result from its role as political camouflage for an effete trade union officialdom presiding over a working class politically enfeebled by Imperialist Partition which enables the bourgeoisie to rule without the need for a MASS reformist workers' party. Only a fundamental programmatic break with reformism - only a consistent revolutionary alternative can be the basis of a genuine mass workers' party.

The tradition of Connolly

The Irish Labour Party in all its forms, in every period of its history, under all its varying leaderships, politically in its programme and outlook has never been anything more than a bourgeois party based on the working class organisations. Its foundation from 1912 when the Irish Congress of Trades Unions constituted itself also as a Labour Party, had the progressive potential of establishing the conscious political independence of the organised working class movement. But Connolly, as its midwife, failed signally to argue - not to speak of establishing - that it should be a revolutionary party in its programme and methods. After Connolly's death the ITUC & LP openly disowned every healthy element of



12 Connolly's subjective revolutionary hostility to capitalism and imperialism.

Its reformist programme led directly to its role as loyal henchmen of the Partitioning of the island and of the working class, and simultaneously the demobilisation of the masses of newly organised workers. That role strengthened the hold of both petty-bourgeois nationalism and syndicalism within the ranks of the working class movement. The political experience of the revolutionary communist tradition of Lenin and Trotsky enables us with hindsight to see that only a struggle for the strategy of Permanent Revolution to unite the working class at the head of the national struggle for the goal of a workers state could have opened the road forward.

Stunted Limits of Labour

The reformism at the heart of the Labour tradition has always defined its politics and organisation. They continue to-day as the framework into which it draws and miseducates the majority of its members, undemocratically driving out any leftward moving tendencies that seriously challenge it. Thus it is a "bourgeois workers party", in Lenin's exact and uncompromising phrase, not only in its leaders but overall, as a Party. Even should it episodically attract the support of wider sections of class-conscious workers such turns to Labour would be - and have been - within the limits of illusions in the bourgeois system of parliamentary hoodwink. However, in the semi-colonial South, socially distorted by the legacy of the aborted national revolution of 1916-22, reformist politics are incapable of even pretending to address the strategic questions facing the class. Thus Labour has never become, in its base of support, a mass party of reformism.

It has rooted itself primarily in the petty-bourgeois bureaucratic caste which rules over the trade unions, and in rural sections of workers most dependent on this bureaucracy. The economic developments of the sixties, the re-unification of the labour and trade union organisations and the growing militancy of workers drove sections of them and of urban liberals towards the Labour Party and forced it to consciously espouse "left" reformist policies. Labour even committed itself to oppose Coalition by 1969! But the revolt of the anti-Unionists in the North threatened political stability throughout the island. The Party machine mobilised to reverse the anti-Coalition stance by using the pro-imperialist "liberals" and the rural base against the Lefts, and latching onto Coalition with Fine Gael since 1973, in and out of office. The Lefts split from Labour in 1971 and again in 1977 but without fighting to mobilise organised workers on an action programme that would have placed demands on Labour to make it accountable to their affiliated organisations.

Left Splits from Labour

The 1971 breakaway included subjectively revolutionary activists who attempted a break with Labour reformism but proved incapable of going beyond the centrism of the international tendencies of degenerated Trotskyism into which they gravitated for survival as organised groups. On the second occasion, 1977, the break was a split at the level of the Party apparatus, again with no mobilised base in any significant sections of workers. The left Labour leaders Merrigan and Browne failed to fight Labour's class collaboration by the only way that would lay

the basis for a revolutionary alternative - turning outwards to the struggles of the class and mobilising real forces in struggle, including the struggle for the rank and file to call the Party machine and the bureaucracy to account. Nevertheless their call for a new party rapidly made the Socialist Labour Party a temporary rallying point for three hundred conscious socialists of many political tendencies.

In the SLP, however, the same left reformists who claimed to have broken with Labourism (Merrigan, Browne, Neligan, Boucher, Bonass etc.), who had funk'd the fight within Labour, now proved that they were wedded to reformist electoral perspectives in the last analysis. This they did by refusing to stand publicly over the most advanced programmatic positions adopted by the SLP Conferences, especially on Political Status and Abortion on Demand, but also on the fight for nationalisation without compensation under workers control as the answer to widespread factory closures - Ferenka, SPS, Courtaulds in Navan, shoe factories etc. In practice they refused to subordinate all electoral tactics to the needs of the living struggle. The centrist tendencies LWR, SWM and MSR (now in PD) rejected the IWG call for a fighting bloc against the leadership. SWM and MSR/PD preferred the wider "unity" of the SLP under the left-reformists at the expense of a fighting workers democracy in the Party. They either left the party (LWR), or acquiesced (MSR/PD) or connived (SWM) with Merrigan & Co. in expelling the IWG tendency. Without any revolutionary opposition to challenge them the reformist leaders used the Local Elections to re-define the party in terms of a thoroughgoing electoral opportunism which sank it into oblivion within months.

Union Bureaucracy and Party Machine

In the June '81 Election Labour's vote dropped significantly, and again in February 1982 to under 9% - due directly to its political treachery - Coalition with the party of capitalist austerity even in opposition. Facing serious hostility from workers and organisational disarray and the loss of seats to Gregory, Kemmy and the Workers Party, the bureaucracy signalled to Labour to remain formally independent of the capitalist parties to "preserve its own identity", i.e. to enable them to preserve their own historic political camouflage. On the eve of the Labour Party conference in Galway in October 1982 the IWG warned in Class Struggle:

"...the unwillingness of the parasitic Labour deputies to settle for anything less than full and open pre-election support for the austerity policies of a bourgeois Coalition deepens the crisis for this party of the trade union bureaucracy. It also enhances the opportunity to force the bureaucracy to give substance to its "left" rhetoric about Labour's "identity" - to force Labour to break with the bourgeoisie! Only the pressure of a mobilised working class clearly demanding this can win it. And workers will not fight for such political demands except under the lead of militants who are being consciously won over to a revolutionary programme. ... That perspective has at its centre the aim of building a mass revolutionary working class party".

- CLASS STRUGGLE No. 11, p.10

The Labour Conference confirmed the inability of that party to reflect in any but the most minor way the growing class hostility to its support of capitalist austerity measures and Coalition. Only a tiny increase in votes against the principle of Coalition

was registered. The brazen demand of Labour leader O'Leary (who joined Fine Gael a week later) and of his closest crony Dick Spring (now the leader) for unconditional commitment to Coalition was only staved off by a deal between Frank Cluskey (the previous leader) and the Union bosses which allowed for post-election negotiations with the capitalist parties and a Conference on the outcome. In helping to carry this resolution the FWUI trade union leaders acted in clear breach of the mandate of their union conference, confirming yet again how the unaccountable machine of the labour movement bureaucracy will never be deterred merely by resolutions.

Within weeks a General Election put Labour again to the test. Labour's vote remained at 9% but it took back seats previously lost through disorganisation, with the aid of the reactionary anti-abortion card played against Kemmy in Limerick by Labour's Prendergast. In Dublin the Workers Party gains put it on a definite course of electorally rivalling Labour on its own terrain. The limited nature of that terrain, however, is attested by the failure of the combined vote in Dublin of all ostensible working class candidates to equal the vote gained by Labour alone in 1965.

The subsequent December 12th special Labour Conference in Limerick exemplified all the worst features of the bureaucratic party machine, demonstrating how it, and not the needs of the class, are always decisive. That is, unless challenged by mobilising the class around a focussed action programme that, as one tactic, seeks to force Labour out of its class collaboration. No open fight was mounted in front of the class by any section of the Left bureaucrats or the Militant tendency to break the shameful secret wheeler-dealing between Spring and Fitzgerald who concocted a Coalition document that the delegates were not even to have time to read before the conference voted on it. That document was sold on the single promise in it to wring a paltry tax from big house owners.

The January '83 Budget sparked off a wave of rank and file attempts to cancel their trade union political levies for Labour. That response failed to deal POLITICALLY with the obstacle of Labour. It was a syndicalist response. It failed to tactically focus on Labour in the form of political demands - to break from Coalition, to make it accountable to the affiliated rank and file, to retain and develop the political levy in the unions and to put it under the conscious control of a fighting elected and recallable union leadership. to fight for conferences of mandated lay delegates to express these demands AS PART OF debating the kind of programme and party the working class needs to answer the capitalist offensive.

It is a bitter irony that without any action being mobilised to break Coalition two deputies (Prendergast and Bell) openly threatened to break the Labour whip in the Dail - in response to the ITGWU bureaucrats! Their action was a token response to show the union bureaucracy to be critical of Labour without, however, mobilising to force it out of Coalition. It was also an empirical defence of a narrow bureaucratic interest - to express the anger (again without achieving anything) of workers on short-time whose pay-related benefits were to be cut by the Social Welfare Act. Bell carried through his threat to vote against. The workers gained nothing, but the bureaucracy conveniently appeared to distance itself from Labour's class collaboration, insulating itself from pressure to take real action.

Centrist Obstacles to the Fight for a Revolutionary Action Programme

Standing between revolutionary communists and the militants of the working class are the Centrist groups - Peoples Democracy, the League for a Workers Republic, Militant tendency and the Socialist Workers Movement who all CLAIM to stand in the tradition of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky but in practice adapt politically to false leaderships in the class or to non-working class Republicanism. They are the Irish sections of the international currents resulting from the collapse of the Fourth International into Centrism by 1951. (For a full discussion of this issue see "The Death Agony of the Fourth International" advertised in this journal.) In putting forward the method and major points of an action programme focussed for the present struggles of the class, and our serious criticisms of reformists, left reformists and Republicans, the IWG is compelled to evaluate and criticise the above groups who, on every serious question facing the class, remain an obstacle to the fight for revolutionary answers. Not to do so would be to leave the class prostrate before syndicalism, reformism and nationalism.

How Militant Tails The Labour Bureaucracy

At the October '82 Labour Conference the IWG intervened at Militant's fringe meeting despite chairperson Joe Higgins' anti-democratic restriction of our right to speak at what was billed as a "public meeting". John Throne, speaking on the "relevance of Connolly" essentially echoed the attempt earlier that day by FWUI's Paddy Cardiff to bless Labour with the holy name of Connolly, calling for a "return" to Connolly's tradition. Throne, like Cardiff, made no explicit affirmation of the best elements of Connolly's perspectives and made no critical analysis of how it is that Connollyism can be touted in the same way by every shade of labourism, stalinism, republicanism and centrism in Ireland. IWG, noting how Connolly failed to found Labour on any element of a conscious revolutionary programme, characterised Labour as always having been a bourgeois workers Party. That means the party overall, not (as Militant believe when they publicly evade Lenin's description of reformist workers' parties) that the leadership is bourgeois or pro-capitalist while the rank and file Labour support is consistently working class in their political outlook. IWG went on to argue how only the open fight for independent working class rank and file action on a programme against the capitalist offensive can be the means also of smashing Labour in the process of building a revolutionary workers party. It is precisely the refusal to fight in this way that is the legacy of Militant's opportunist role in that Party.

Militant's entryism in Labour has been a thorough falsification of Trotsky's entry TACTIC which was defined as a temporary turn in specific conditions when workers were moving into open struggle and pushing sections of the reformist political leadership into a left centrist position. The necessary condition of liquidating the revolutionary cadre organisation temporarily into a reformist party had the concrete and immediate possibility, through that party, of being able to present a clear revolutionary action programme openly to the most advanced sections of workers already in struggle. Its strategic purpose could never be anything less than to wage a more effective fight for the revolutionary communist programme and party and the political destruction of the reformist party's hold over the vanguard.

The Militant tendency, by contrast, believing in an inevitable revolutionary process transforming the trade union parties, defined themselves around a

strategic attempt to take up and hold an organisational presence in the British Labour Party, at the expense of arguing a revolutionary communist action programme to the most class-conscious workers. They initially claimed that the impending capitalist catastrophe made it necessary to be in that party because there was no time to build the revolutionary party. In the long post-war boom, however, they began to justify their irreversible liquidation with the opposite excuse - that it would be a long time before the capitalist catastrophe would arrive to push the workers towards them, the 'Marxists', that it was imperative to preserve their place within the official organs in the meantime at all costs. Neither of these methods has anything in common with Trotsky's method of entryism elaborated in the thirties and which is re-presented in a pamphlet available from IWG - "Entryism, Trotsky's Forgotten Tactic".

Militant later transplanted its strategic entryism to the conditions of Ireland where the nature of the Irish Labour Party also had to be falsified to 'justify' it. Instead of the tactically flexible fight to build the programme and nucleus of a revolutionary combat party Militant works with a 'scenario' in which the political development of the working class must 'necessarily' bring them into action under the lead of the Irish Labour Party. They adopt as their STRATEGY the reforming of Labour by winning into it a few hundred new activists: "An influx of 200 to 300 trade union activists would be sufficient to transform the Party." - (Editorial, MIM 110). In order to preserve Labour for the moment when 'history' will bring the masses to it Militant makes itself the most active section of that Party in the towns, rescuing its collapsed organisation and canvassing votes at a time when open revulsion towards Labour among the most combative workers has slashed Labour's votes and begun a rash of disaffiliations by workers.

At the Militant fringe meeting at the Limerick Labour conference IWG was denied speaking rights. IWG issued a bulletin arguing why delegates must smash Coalition and argued how the brand of "anti-coalitionism" peddled by Militant offered no basis for a real fightback - either in the economic struggle or in addressing the question of Government. The IWG bulletin stated that the fight for revolutionary communist politics in relation to the Irish Labour Party

"can only mean a fight to force Labour out of Coalition, and other forms of collaboration, NOT in order to proclaim that Labour can thereby bring socialism through parliament but to open up the ROAD OF STRUGGLE for a Workers Government. The programme on which such a government would be

fought for would have to be SPELT OUT:- it would have to defend every gain of the masses in struggle; it would have to begin dismantling the apparatus of the capitalist state; it would have to arm the militias of the working class for the overthrow of capitalist rule, the expropriation of capital, and the construction of the Workers' Republic - the dictatorship of the proletariat".

Confronted with the day-by-day provocations of the Coalition against the working class since December, Militant have signally failed to put to the fore the fight for workers' independent class action against that offensive or for workers to mobilise to force Labour to break with Coalition. The Labour Youth Conference at the end of January was dominated by Militant. Yet not a single call was heard from it for action to FORCE Labour to break with Coalition or for action to FORCE Labour deputies to defy the Whip on anti-working class measures. Militant does not dare to infringe on the pseudo-legitimacy of the Party machine in that way. By March, Militant's paper was wrestling with its conscience. Without going so far as to call for action to force the Party out of Government - less still to force individual deputies to break ranks - Militant argued in small print - and in the abstract - that because the Budget failed to deliver on promises of tax reform the Limerick Conference mandate to enter Coalition was no longer binding, that therefore "Labour TDs should refuse to support these measures which inflict hardship on the working people".

This cowardly tailing of the Labour bureaucracy was exposed sharply by the way it left the initiative to Bell and Prendergast whose threats to break the Whip aimed to DEFUSE workers' anger! Militant had put itself to the right even of the bureaucracy! As warned in the IWG bulletin at Limerick:

"Militant Tendency not only makes its supporters instruments of Labour's electoral opportunism again and again, but it actually places itself to the right of all those sections of workers who have pitted themselves against the labour movement bureaucracy time and again and to whom Militant can only offer exhortations to direct their energies into parliamentary channels."

It is this 'method' that leads Militant to reject what IWG argues as the central tactic in putting the working class on a war footing - the fight for a revolutionary Rank and File Movement. For such a movement can only be built on a fighting programme against the capitalist offensive and for workers democracy in the unions if it is based on the principle of INDEPENDENCE of the labour and trade union bureaucracy - and their Lefts. The method of such a fighting movement has to be to force the Union officials to support its action but equally to go ahead with the action and to fight against the bureaucracy where necessary. For Militant it is always necessary to FIRST have the support of the official leaderships of Trades Councils, Unions and Labour Party.

THE ECONOMISM OF THE SWM — TAIL THE EXISTING STRUGGLES

"These people who cannot pronounce the word 'theoretician' without a sneer, who describe their gnudeflections to common lack of training and backwardness as a 'sense for the realities of life', reveal in practice a failure to understand our most imperative PRACTICAL tasks."

"... how tactless Rabocheye Dyelo is when, with an air of triumph, it quotes Marx's statement: 'Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes'. To repeat these words in a period of theoretical disorder is like wishing mourners at a funeral many happy returns of the day".

- Lenin in What Is To Be Done.

The object of this attack by Lenin was 'economism', a general tendency to limit political perspectives to the immediate objectives of the existing struggles of the proletariat, as well as to abstractly 'lend the economic struggle itself a political character'. The most thorough expression of that method among the Centrists in these islands is in the current of the Socialist Workers Party in Britain and its sister group in Ireland, the Socialist Workers Movement.

On the other hand, revolutionary Marxists have always seen their tasks as flowing from a scientifically worked out programme, made concrete for each period, as the basis and condition for intervening in the struggles of the exploited and oppressed:

"But what else is the function of Social-Democracy (the Marxist party) if not to be a 'spirit' that hovers over the spontaneous movement, but also RAISES this movement TO THE LEVEL OF 'ITS PROGRAMME'?"

Surely it is not its function to drag at the TAIL of the movement?" - What is to be Done:

As we wrote in "SWM Mark II", in Class Struggle, June 1980:-

"Instead they operate with the idea that the Party can be built NOT around a fight for a socialist political programme within the class but by a group providing the effective RALLYING POINT to 'co-ordinate' the already ongoing struggles of the militants on the shop floor for wages and conditions. Thus without a correct concept of the programme SWM FETISHISES trade union 'militancy' - in effect trade union reformism - as the basis for a spontaneous transition to revolutionary consciousness. The party, therefore, is seen as the most EFFICIENT force in 'linking up' workers in their ongoing everyday struggles. It is not seen as a force for bringing TO these everyday struggles the necessary tactical and strategic focus of confronting in action capitalist power and its State. For SWM there is QUALITATIVELY no distinction between 'the party' and the 'rank and file'.

Therefore, faced with the political crises of the working class, the economism of SWP and SWM - and its OPPORTUNIST method - turns away from the vital task of POLITICAL training and regroupment of a revolutionary cadre organisation and retreats into the trenches of trade union routinism.

In the propaganda of the SWM this shows in abstract calls for a 'fightback', combined with trite, vague and meaningless commonplaces that offer a basis for precisely nothing. The front page of The Worker in Jan/Feb '83 poses the important question "But where's the fight to come from? Who's going to lead the troops into battle?" After columns of assurances that it will not be the officials we are told:

"... in order to break out, rank and file workers will have to take the initiative. There's nobody else"

and

"what it does mean is beginning THE ARGUMENT, at work, at branch meetings, on the dole queues, in the pub, wherever, and winning the widest possible support for a fightback in '83"

What argument, what forms of organisation, what goals, what strategy, tactics, slogans, we are not told - there or anywhere else - by the SWM.

Incapable of going beyond the world view of trade union politics SWM attempts to lend a political character to the sectional wage struggles of the class with calls for more militancy combined with ABSTRACT moral invocation of the need for socialism as the answer to the horrors of capitalist anarchy - with membership of the SWM as the best indulgence on offer. They reject the need for concrete tactics and theoretical and ideological struggle to confront and defeat the existing political perspectives and leaderships that stand in the way of the fight for revolutionary politics. It has thus been a matter of doctrine for them to reject the tactic of workers in struggle being won to place demands on Labour because Labour was "irrelevant" to the class - just as in SWM's practice all questions of political consciousness - beyond moral outrage at capitalism - are excluded from the "real struggle".

The logic of that view is that SWM cheerleads the apolitical militancy of sections of the class - as in Clondalkin and Ranks sit-ins where never once did they make a political assessment or a critique of the crippling limits of those militant struggles. Never once did they even attempt, for example, to argue an anti-capitalist content to the nationalisation demands i.e. expropriation without compensation to the bosses, the fight for workers' control, nationalise not just one plant but that whole industry etc.. (Demands that could tap the popular anger towards the bosses concerned, pose class-wide goals, offer a working class answer to reformist objections about the 'cost' of the nationalisations, and begin to popularise the fight for workers veto in the workplace.)

The politics of SWM only serve the left-reformist leaders who are prepared to sponsor and stand over that sectional militancy so as to better control it, defuse workers' anger and deflect it from revolutionary tasks. In general, it makes the SWM an obstacle to the fight for the communist action programme - the only basis for a revolutionary Rank and File Movement.

The Centrism of PD and LWR - Adaptation to Nationalism

The Peoples Democracy and League for a Workers Republic represent in Ireland the two major international fragments of degenerated Trotskyism. The centrism of both has a common origin in the dogmatism and blind optimism that prevented the post-war Fourth International from re-elaborating its programme for the new period of Imperialist stability and Stalinist expansion into E. Europe. The dogmatism of the FI(PCR)/LWR current claims to oppose the revisions of the USFI/PD. Neither tendency, however, bases its practice in a revolutionary communist method. Both groups at bottom share the mistaken belief that the historical process, in varied forms, of itself guarantees the revolution. That is why they reject as sectarian and ultra-left what is a duty and a principle in the revolutionary communist, the Trotskyist, tradition: - to explain clearly to the militants of the class the objective tasks, strategy and tactics that must be taken up, in a coherent transitional action programme for workers' power. In the specific imperialised conditions of Ireland, their brand of centrism adapts chiefly to revolutionary nationalism - Republicanism.

For these centrists the fight for the Revolutionary Nationalist goal of "national unity and independence" will, in and of itself, lead to the creation of a Workers' Republic. That is, objective reality will turn the fight for the progressive bourgeois nationalist goal of unity and independence into the dictatorship of the proletariat! The idea of Permanent Revolution, in which the working class comes to the lead of the anti-imperialist struggle and at the same time resolves in its own favour the question of what class is to rule, becomes for them an OBJECTIVE "process" INDEPENDENT of a conscious strategy openly argued in the fight for a revolutionary communist leadership. Both groups confirm this actual liquidation of communist politics by giving repeated political support to the Republicans - as in the H-Block campaign, in calling for votes for them in the Prior Assembly Elections, the Feb '82 Southern Elections etc.

THE WORKER
FOR WORKERS POWER AND INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM

**Coalition stick in boot
ORGANISE
TO FIGHT**

Picket Labour Party HQ. 5 February. 11.30am (see P4/5)

Worker exclusive: IDA factories set to collapse

SITING: a statement of the Rank and File Group...

by EAMONN MCCANN

IN CHINA, 1982 was the year...

Where a system is in a state...

The problem is, these factories are not structurally safe.

The came to light when a press firm, who were constructing bridges to construct their factory...

But not even the SWM could insulate itself from political realities after Labour pledged support for the 1983 Budget. Blindly following the hand-rail of workers' anger the SWM declared Labour to be the "weak link" in the Coalition and mounted a picket on Labour's Head Office. In practice their action did not go beyond the limits of a stunt. But it raises questions to which SWM members have a right to demand answers from their leaders. Why this action, why call Labour the weak link in the Coalition if not because it is a party whose programme and actions fly in the face of the class on which it is based through the trade unions? That is, the contradiction that makes Labour the 'weak link' is only one side of the reality that makes Labour a political obstacle in the class to the fight for revolutionary socialism. SWM's method, however, rules out any coherent fighting tactics to break workers from reformist political illusions because its whole method implies that workers' militancy in itself will destroy reformist illusions, that militancy is itself revolutionary!

LWR -

ABSTRACTION AND OPPORTUNISM

Combining programmatic dogmatism with adaptation to Republicanism, the LWR practises a method in which action goals and slogans are proclaimed to the masses only when the class has already moved into action - unveiling the signposts already arrived at. This equally applies in tailing the economic struggles of the Southern working class - 'lending them a political character', interpreting them as expressions of 'national' revolt which need as their present goal no more than the slogans of the Left revolutionary nationalists. Workers Republic No. 95:

"Recent issues of the 'Workers' Republic' have explained how the 26 counties is being robbed by international big business, and how the economy of the entire island is subordinated to its interests and distorted by the institutions of Partition.

There is no way out of the economic crisis through the attacks on living standards supported by the Coalition and Fianna Fail. All that lies along that road is a return to the widespread poverty of the fifties.

The only way forward is the complete reorganisation of the economy of the 32 counties in the interests of the Irish people.

This can only be done by a fully sovereign and independent government of a united 32-County Ireland, after the driving out of the British forces and the dismantling of the collaborationist institutions linked to Leinster House.

With Connolly, we believe that Irish unity is necessary, now, to deal with the economic crisis and solve all the problems of Irish society, South as well as North. It is not a "long-term aspiration" which has nothing to do with people's day-to-day problems.

With Connolly, we believe that a mass 32-county workers' party committed to Irish unity is urgently needed to fight for the rights of working people combined with the fight for Irish unity.

While many people may agree with this, only the LWR is actively campaigning for such a party today".

Of course LWR's Healy, Coulter etc. will claim in private to have such Trotskyist aims. But at this STAGE the workers are only ready for the democratic slogans of the national revolution. Such propaganda abandons the whole transitional method of Trotskyism. Nowhere does it attempt to win class-conscious workers to revolutionary communism. It offers them instead the programme of the Lefts in Sinn Féin!

LWR and the General Strike

LWR in Feb. headlined the abstract slogan "Down with the Government". Neither the slogan nor their bulletin deal with the question of how; or what alternative would replace it. For LWR the onward march of the class will deal with those questions in its own time! Meanwhile left-reformists, left Republicans, even Labour and the bureaucracy DO address those questions NOW - with a view to controlling any onward march! The method was exemplified by the LWR's role in the initial attempt to bring out Dublin workers alongside Waterford workers to develop the fight for Tax equity. May 4th in Dublin saw an intensive debate at a substantial meeting of shop-stewards in which speaker after speaker argued to press forward with one-day strikes building up to an indefinite widespread stoppage - several stewards spoke explicitly of a General Strike. The only motion facing the meeting was from an IWG steward proposing five points - (a) to elect a mandatable action committee (b) to sharpen the demands to explicitly include steep taxes on profits, wealth and capital gains (c) to openly declare that the stoppages had the goal of a General Strike (d) to publicly demand that all official leaderships of Trades Councils, Unions and Congress should back the action and (e) to convene a National Conference of shopstewards. Healy (LWR) took the initiative in arguing that no demand on taxing the bosses or the rich should appear in the platform - that we should defer to the leadership of the Waterford stewards in putting forward a platform without that demand! He argued against taking any decision except to have an organising committee for the proposed one-day stoppage! On the strategy, the goal of the action, on the question of a Conference he was silent - and opposed to the IWG - despite the unanimity that workers had no faith in token stoppages! On the question of the official leaderships his answer was to "lobby" the Dublin Trades Council! Arguing for intensive "organisation" within the existing terms of the struggle as defined by the Waterford stewards - in reality by the Left-reformist current around Merrigan, Healy's motion was carried against the IWG's by about 40 to 16. Incredibly, ten days later Healy issued a 'Workers Republic' leaflet ANNOUNCING that the shop-stewards tax committees were the most advanced form of struggle yet seen "for the General Strike". Those committees pulled out a very scattered 10,000 strikers on May 16th (4,000 in Dublin) but NO call for a General Strike and NO STRATEGY for the struggle was heard from any quarter.

It was left to the Labour Party to resuscitate the question of taxes on wealth and capital in the week before the 16th in the Dail, as left cover for the Coalition's unchallenged move to EXEMPT exported multinational profits from the new 'Advance Corporation Tax'! The Union leaders stepped up their call to divert anger on taxes into parliamentary lobbying. ITGWU's Deputy Bell tabled amendments to the Finance Act to scrap the Levies and alleviate income tax and the tax activists fell in behind the "lobby" tactic DESPITE their open hostility to Merrigan, Carroll and Labour.

workers republic

No. 96

May 1983

Price 20p

Shop-stewards organise for General Strike

Speaking at the tax march, Matt Merrigan advocated rolling stoppages culminating in a general strike as the only way to force the government to submit.

workers republic

JOURNAL OF THE LEAGUE FOR A WORKERS REPUBLIC

Feb. 1983

Price 20p

No. 97

Clondalkin, Ranks show the way
National Stoppage to beat the Cuts
Down with the Government

GENERAL STRIKE
The struggle is not confined to the tax march. Thomas MacGiolla has led off tax by the Waterford stewards. Waterford campaign in the current

the trade unions are discouraging us should wait for the local tax march as to forget that they are not FREE to leave Healy in

The Communist Party of Ireland in the trade union movement in the Communist Party supporter. Now onwards in St. Anthony's the Waterford stewards. And the the Waterford-Merrigan initiative the ATGWU, origins and

Parties linked to the socialist govern-

In other words a mass Party is to be built for the bourgeois-democratic aim of a united Ireland as the key to "deal with the economic crisis" and for "reorganising the economy" - under a "sovereign and independent government"! Not the proletarian dictatorship; not a transitional Workers Government; not socialism; not the overthrow of capitalism - nothing but a more united, sovereign and independent Bourgeois democracy!

Peoples Democracy

'Subordinate Our Differences There is Too Much At Stake'

The Peoples Democracy group, no less opportunist than LWR in practice, has the additional distinction that it explicitly justifies its liquidation of Trotskyism and adaptation to left nationalism.

In "Ireland for Sale" - reproduced in the USFI's "International Viewpoint" No. 29 (2/5/83) the PD argues the following theses.

"... protectionism enabled industrial employment to more than double in the two decades following De Valera's coming to power. Yet by the mid-Fifties, Irish industry was in crisis.

"The conservative economists suggest ... that any strategy which sought to base itself on the home market was doomed.

"This argument is essentially superficial because it fails to take into account the overall socio-economic context within which protectionist policies were pursued.

"The real weakness of De Valera's protectionist programme was that it sought to modify, rather than fundamentally alter, the neo-colonialist character of the Irish economy."

In the espousal here of reactionary and petty-bourgeois economic nationalism, Peoples Democracy conceals the fact that De Valera's strategy represented the CAPITALIST interests of the Irish ruling class. It was a strategy based on the economic nationalism of the historic Sinn Fein.

This represented the need of a weak Irish bourgeoisie to survive against the pressure of British imperialism from above and the working class and small farmers from below. To do so successfully it had to mobilise all the forces and demagoguery of populist Catholic Irish Republicanism - up to and including the popular-frontist alliance with Irish labour, Stalinism and the IRA against the Blueshirt menace - in order to incorporate the exploited masses on its side.

The method that gives rise to PD's willful distortion of the class realities of Irish nationalism is, like LWR's, one that schematically and in separate stages entrusts to the OBJECTIVE PROCESS of Irish national revolution the task of mobilising the masses, in the belief that, once roused, they will INEVITABLY put an end to bourgeois CLASS rule!

Indeed PD's tailing of protectionism means NOT recognising that De Valera's party was a CAPITALIST party of the RULING CLASS.

Relegating the Fight For Socialism

PD proceeds to unfold its programme - "Towards Economic Independence" - again without ever once espousing the goal of socialism in the whole of a pamphlet whose importance is doubled by the extreme rarity of any such lengthy treatment of ANY subject by PD. It calls for:-

- * nationalisation of banks, insurance, major industries
- * withdrawal from the EEC and state monopoly of foreign trade which "would prevent industrialists hostile to national (!) control of the economy from removing plant and machinery from Ireland".
- * a national plan of development
- * "workers' self-management"
- * state aid for small farmers' co-ops, nationalisation of big farms
- * public works to "reduce" unemployment
- * "Abolition of the Border".

Therefore, the agent to carry through what PD calls this "radical economic programme", to overcome "Ireland's deepening dependence on foreign capital" is to be "An Anti-Imperialist Government". Not a transitional Workers' Government - not to speak of the actual workers' dictatorship - but a government of left revolutionary nationalism - to "offer a clear alternative to the corruption and bankruptcy of Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and Labour. It is a programme tailored, in its vagueness on questions of CLASS rule and in its nationalism, to the Lefts in Sinn Fein. It is not a principled proposal for a united front of common ACTION against the offensive of capitalist imperialism. It is a systematic rejection of any fight NOW for internationalist proletarian communist politics in the interests instead of a common fight for the programme of Left Republicanism:-

"Towards that alternative we must subordinate our differences to the common goal. There is too much at stake to do otherwise".

In the South, despite all their fulminations against present-day Fianna Fail, it is precisely from this quarter that the greatest danger is posed by sowing illusions in left nationalism. For, it is not beyond the ability of that party to revive its populist nationalism to divert and behead workers' confrontations with the bosses over factory closures in a situation of mass unemployment. State-capitalist nationalisations by bourgeois populists in such circumstances, far from being a contradiction, can be an acceptable temporary tactic in the strategy of the ruling class to preserve stability, cement its hold over the working class and continue its austerity measures.

In practice PD refuses to argue transitional action goals which would overcome the crippling limits of the existing consciousness of workers in struggle. At the eve-of-Mayday meeting of the Ranks Solidarity Group - convened to establish a centre of solidarity with struggles against closures - an IWG steward argued the need for a conference to hammer out an action programme and instanced the particular defect in existing occupations demanding nationalisation that they failed to raise the vital anti-capitalist demand of expropriation without compensation for the bosses. While the Ranks representative accepted the point, PD's Ann Speed (a full-time ITGWU official) accused the IWG of "thereby trying to impose a revolutionary programme, of leaping 'six steps ahead of the workers'", stating that the workers had to learn by experience!

It is a method fully opposed to the open fight by revolutionary communists for a rank and file movement which would be consciously independent of all wings of the bureaucracy in its organisation, and armed with an action programme which links present struggles against the bosses' offensive to the tasks that open up the struggle to overthrow capitalism and imperialism.

Anti-Abortion Amendment

For the whole of February, March and April the working class movement and women were rendered passive spectator to a Dail riven by bitter conflict between the bourgeois parties over what form of constitutional amendment would best copperfasten the existing criminal status of abortion. For the majority in Fine Gael the problem was to find a formula consistent with Protestant interests and that Party's strategic courtship of Ulster Unionism and British Imperialism. For Fianna Fail the only question was how most effectively to stir up the putrid muck of rabid Catholic anti-abortion and anti-woman sentiment against Fine Gael. Divided three ways on the basis of "freedom of conscience", Labour attempted to ride both horses and to oppose the concept of a referendum - while all three sections made absolutely clear their opposition to Abortion and to a woman's right to choose.

NO GAINS FOR WOMEN WHILE THE LEFT TRAILS THE LIBERALS

In a whole year the "Anti-Amendment Campaign" had failed to build any principled fight oriented to the class organisations of workers and especially working women. It had failed to in any way define goals of struggle that could have welded together the best activists or clarified them. No gains were made towards building the nucleus of a movement to fight for woman's liberation and the separation of Church and State. Instead the campaign - CREATED by the Centrists of Peoples Democracy, supported fully by the SWM despite their initial 'left' condition that it had to also stand for Abortion On Demand - has hidden behind the skirts of the Protestant clergy and handed the leadership to thoroughly bourgeois forces incapable of FIGHTING the Churches. The majority of its leading supporters in the media were adamant in their open opposition to Abortion!

Class Struggle in October '82 warned of this outcome. We argued that any sections willing to fight could be, and had to be, won to openly fight NOW, not only to stop the Referendum but, to repeal the Family Planning Act and the 1861 Act (sections 58-59), i.e. to decriminalise abortion. That would leave it open in the struggle, in democratic debate, whether the fight should be developed for strictly limited clinical facilities (supported by Kemmy and many others) - or for Abortion on Demand for which IWG has openly argued since our emergence in 1975 - to replace the 1861 Act. The Centrists pandered at every point to the backward belief that the present "unity" with

respectable middle class liberals should not be endangered by an open fight against the 1861 Act.

Fatal Self-Imposed Limits of A.A.C.

The Campaign ruthlessly limited the fight to the bourgeois liberal terrain of the constitutional and inter-Church issues of the PLAC amendment. Thus, unchallenged by the Centrists, the PLAC were allowed define the whole battle within the terrain of all-round opposition to abortion as such!

The sharpened awareness of the Contraception issue among the Campaign's followers forced its way at every point into the propaganda and arguments of the leadership - but only to be deflected as rhetoric and not focussed in a clear demand to scrap the reactionary Family Planning Act.

November saw a 2,000 strong march through Dublin on the eve of the Elections against the Amendment but the existing leadership refused at the following day's meeting to convene an open conference to draw in those forces. (SWM voted both ways on the proposal!) In December when doctor Andrew Rynne provoked State legal action against himself for defiance of the Family Planning Act, an IWG trade union delegate to the restricted AAC meeting was allowed to table an emergency motion connecting the issue to the Campaign. It called for mobilisation in defence of Rynne, the scrapping of the Family Planning Act, the defence of woman's "right to control her own fertility" and the convening of an open conference for January open to all activists. Having first been allowed, as soon as it was proposed it was suddenly ruled "out of order" by Campaign bureaucrats Mary Gordon and Helen Mahony because "this campaign has no position on a woman's right to control her fertility" (!).

The Right Carries the Day

Protestant dissent impaled Fitzgerald on the stake of his previous campaign for "pluralism" and his rapprochement with Unionism. So, a new Amendment formula was found.

During the entire Parliamentary crisis only one demonstration was held - because of illusions that Fine Gael's less offensive wording was a "victory"! The forces mobilised were, again, NOT drawn into democratic conferences of the campaign. Then on April 9th the ultra-Catholics of the Coalition, 8 Fine Gael and 5 Labour(!), crossed the floor to give the vict-



ory to Fianna Fail and the "Pro-Life Amendment Campaign"! Thus opened a Referendum campaign that represents a blow to the rights of women - with implications well beyond the boundaries of Ireland.

It was capped by the open hostility of the judiciary towards homosexual rights - in mitigating assaults on gays and in reaffirming the constitutionality of the 1861 prohibition on sex between males on the grounds of the "christian" ethos of the South!

Without that outcome, however, the Right had already made all the gains and re-mobilised the power of the Catholic Church openly into Irish politics. And even though there was never the concrete possibility - in the given balance of forces - that the Referendum could have been stopped, real gains could have been made - but were instead squandered by the opportunism of the Centrists.

What Starting Point?

In working to create the nucleus of a fighting movement - clear in its ideas and its orientation to the working class - to BEGIN the struggle for women's liberation, revolutionary communists are obliged at times to propose immediate platforms of agreed action which fall short of the full objective needs of women. Such is the platform argued by IWG to oppose NOW not only the Referendum but the F.P. Act and the 1861 Act, to organise through open democratic conferences and to turn to the organisations of the working class and women workers as the key force. Such a platform could have addressed in class terms the real substance, and not the constitutional shadow, of the challenge from the Right. That challenge is but the catspaw for an offensive against key democratic rights for women and the working class; it is inseparable from the general offensive of the bourgeoisie.

Not for one moment can the immediate struggles be separated from our fight against all forms of subordination to bourgeois and petty bourgeois leaderships like those who dictate the politics of the Anti-Amendment propaganda bloc. For, revolutionary communists fight at all points for the independently organised working class to take the lead of all struggles for democratic rights on the road to its own class power.

While arguing the best immediate tactics we openly seek to win women fighters into a Trotskyist and Party political leadership within independent organisations of a mass women's movement centred on the working class. We work to create and win such a movement - through the mobilisations for its EVERY immediate demand - to the struggle for working class power. No other road can eliminate the system of CLASS rule which guarantees the continued oppression of women and of human sexuality in general.

Nicky Kelly And The Fight Against Repression

Ten years after the Offences Against the State Act was broadened to crush resurgent republican militancy, no nucleus exists of a fighting movement against repression capable of calling out organised workers action to free Nicky Kelly, the IRSP member brutalised and framed under that repressive law and jailed for 12 years. Had the consistent and principled fight for such a movement been undertaken throughout that decade Nicky Kelly would not have been forced to resort to hunger strike.

The question of repression, in its every aspect, is a FUNDAMENTAL one for the working class movement. And Nicky Kelly's case is one that poses in the most crystal-clear fashion the pro-imperialist, the anti-democratic and the brutal character of ruling class "justice" in dealing with those who politically threaten it.

Nicky Kelly's heroic act of desperation DEMANDS the fight by working class militants for every possible measure of direct action with the goal of a General Strike to win his release, FORCING Labour, the Workers Party and the union leaders to call for that action and that demand.

Tragically, the legacy of Republican tactics - which have relegated the fight for mobilised working class action to an episodic publicity tactic - and the legacy of centrism which has refused to fight against the stream for direct action on a principled united front basis - have resulted in the absence now, as in the H-Block campaign, of any fighting nucleus of an independent working class anti-repression movement. Unfortunately, in the moment of most desperate need, only limited cross-class moral PROTEST, and not the FORCE of direct economic action at the point of production, can be roused to plead the case of Nicky Kelly. It was the same with the H-Block campaign. In issue after issue of Class Struggle since its inception in 1976 the IWG has drawn in detail the lessons of this experience and warned of the inevitable consequences.

The fight against repressive legislation, to abolish the juryless Courts, to end arbitrary arrest and detention North and South, to defend every anti-imperialist, socialist or worker held under any of these institutions - remain vital tasks around which to begin to build workers' action committees against repression - as the basis now of driving back the offensive of the bourgeoisie on all fronts and preparing the vanguard of the class for the defence of its own organised existence in the struggles ahead.



A FIGHTING PROGRAMME AGAINST THE CAPITALIST OFFENSIVE ~ FOR WORKERS POWER!

Build the Rank and File Movement against the Capitalist Offensive

The organised working class, overall and despite its profound divisions, remains strong and combative. The trade union and labour bureaucracy, however, as a matter of its own survival, blocks any attempt to mobilise workers' direct action on a class-wide basis under the democratic control of the rank and file. It prevents the working class from confronting, with its own class power, the offensive of the ruling class against living standards and workers' organisations.

Militants must fight to transform the labour and trade union movement on the basis of:-

- * A worked out and focussed action programme linking to-day's struggles to the fight for workers power;
- * Workers democracy - putting all the organisations of the class under the direct democratic control of the rank and file.
- * Force the official leaderships to fight for the demands of the rank and file. Full support for the officials insofar as they are made to fight for these demands, but no holding back for them to act! Against the officials where necessary!
- * Build new rank and file organisations to link workers in struggle, in the workplaces, in each town, each industry and internationally across every multi-national company.
- * Build local committees of struggle in the communities; of housewives, of youth; committees to fight the cuts, to monitor prices etc. - and centralise them in local workers' democratic Action Councils.
- * For a rank and file Alliance of Public Sector Workers.
- * For a national union of the unemployed to fight for their needs, with full rights within the ICTU and Trades Councils.
- * For a trade union press to combat the bosses' propaganda, open to political debate. For embargoes on bourgeois media to enforce right of reply to all slanders of workers in struggle.
- * For all working class fighting organisations to be open to democratic political debate and freedom of propaganda for all tendencies committed to the struggles of the class.
- * For organisational INDEPENDENCE of any political party.

The fight for such an independent Rank and File movement means NO RELIANCE on Left trade union

officials - such as Merrigan & Co. - who CLAIM to champion rank and file protests against the bureaucracy. Even in beginning the fight for the initial forms of the rank and file movement (such as a national shop-stewards movement) the policy of alliances with such officials is a recipe for betrayal of the rank and file. They must be forced to support in ACTION the programme of the movement as the condition of holding any office in it - especially the fight to make all full-timers subject to election and recall by the rank and file.

Against the Centrist argument that such Lefts must be the initial leaders so as to win a broad enough support for a rank and file fightback, we argue that no lasting gains can be made except by welding class-conscious militants into a fighting nucleus of a new movement on the basis of a clear action programme that brooks no illusions in left reformism. The support of every official won ON THAT BASIS is a gain worth fighting for. But the fight for the Rank and File Movement must proceed now on the basis of uniting and clarifying a Revolutionary Minority.

Guided by the experience of the working class internationally and the political gains of the Leninist Trotskyist tradition, revolutionary communists fight tooth and nail against any trading of the principles of the struggle to (supposedly) win broader numbers to an alliance based on a left-reformist fudge of illusions about solving workers' problems without overthrowing capitalism! The fight for the revolutionary Rank and File movement must be waged within every attempt of the rank and file to create an alternative leadership, even where at present such attempts remain under the thumb of centrists and left reformists.

We are not ultimatists. We do not demand acceptance of our programme as a condition of our involvement in the rank and file movement, neither do we make it a precondition of activity within the rank and file. At every state, in every key struggle, we fight for those elements of our programme vital to victory in the struggle and the strengthening of the movement of the rank and file.

We seek to build a rank and file movement totally independent in its organisation, having its own democratic internal life, its own elected leadership and publishing its own elected leadership and publishing its own propaganda and agitational material. We fight for leadership of such a movement by openly proclaiming and fighting for our action programme in the day to day struggles of the class, confident that we will

be proved the most consistent fighters for the interests of the class and will attract to our banner the best militants.

FOR WORKERS' DEMOCRACY

- * For the election of all union officials subject to recall, paying them the average wage of members and holding open jobs for them to return to.
- * Kick Out The Bureaucrats!
- * Put the union branches under direct workplace control
- * For full access by the ranks to the minutes of Branch and Union Executive meetings.
- * For recruitment drives, positive discrimination, creches and meetings in worktime to actively involve women workers. For the right of women workers to caucus.
- * For all Trades Councils and all Union Conferences and Congress to comprise only elected and recallable lay delegates of the rank and file.
- * For bargaining by united workplace committees and Combine committees controlled by the rank and file in each industry.
- * For the Closed Shop - 100% trade unionism and the right of Trade Unionists to discipline fellow workers who flout democratic decisions taken in the interests of the workforce.
- * For Industrial Unions:- One union for every major industrial sector to put an end to craft divisions. Oppose the attempts of the bosses' state to impose their forms of 'rationalisation'. Amalgamations on the basis of rank and file control!
- * For a single united Congress and an end to the separate divisive Northern Committee.

Workers must not pay for the bosses' crisis

In their present offensive the bourgeoisie are served in the first instance by their lieutenants in the working class, the bureaucrats. At every point they seek to have workers accept "our share" of "responsibility". Thus they "recognise the necessity of" and even openly call for "sacrifices" by workers.

Far from winning a better life in return those "sacrifices" can pave the way for the victory of the bosses in smashing the working class for a whole new period. On the other hand, the direct defence of every immediate need of the working class, linked to the fight to smash capitalism for ever, alone can guarantee a better life for humanity.

The starting point for workers' defence against the capitalist offensive must be all-out resistance to every attack on living standards - for the defence of take-home wages, jobs and social services.

FOR TAX EQUITY !

Make the Rich and the Bosses pay Cancel the Debts !

Income tax on wages and welfare benefits, special levies on wages, social insurance deductions, VAT, duties etc. are piled up into a crushing burden on workers in order to pay off "debts" to international banker capitalists and their local partners and brokers. State borrowing has functioned to buy social peace and facilitate private capital through new infrastructures, training and, and massive free grants for business and capitalist farming which pay NO taxes - or at most 10% on profits.

The fight for "tax equity" must be sharpened - and extended in its anti-capitalist content - by putting to the fore clear demands that will not allow the ICTU, Labour or WP off the hook in their wheeler dealing with the Government.

- * Cancel the PRSI Levies on wages!
- * Index workers' tax-free allowances and tax bands to compensate for inflation!
- * For a steeply progressive income tax on capitalist farmers!
- * For steeply progressive taxes on wealth, capital gains, and corporation profits!
- * Open the books of the rich to WORKERS' inspection!
- * In all union bargaining wage demands must be calculated strictly in terms of take-home pay!

The working class must reject every shred of responsibility for the debts of the bosses' state, and there is only one slogan that can answer their lies - Cancel the Debts! Such a slogan can be a weapon for militants to cut through the mealy-mouthed deceptions of Labour, WP and the bureaucracy who will cry horror at the plain truth however much they say "of course workers are not to blame but ...". At the same time such a slogan begins to pose for workers the political questions of what strategy and what party is needed to fight for the political power of the class to cancel those debts, for the bourgeoisie can never do it.

FIGHT THE CUTS !

Fight for workers direct action and class-wide solidarity for:-

- * Block the cuts. Fill all vacancies. Break the embargo. No to reduced services or extra workloads!
- * For local trade-union based committees of action against the cuts.
- * For the cancellation of interest on debts of public service authorities and the nationalisation of all banks and finance houses with no compensation to the owners, putting them under workers inspection and veto.
- * Cancel this year's cuts in useful public spending and restore cuts already implemented. Scrap ALL military spending!
- * Index social spending to inflation!
- * Stop all de-nationalisation and privatisation of state property! For workers' veto over management in the state companies!
- * Increase benefits to all social welfare dependents to the level of a living wage indexed to inflation!
- * Expand the social services and create jobs for the unemployed! Tax the Bosses and the rich!

Occupations to fight closures

Mass unemployment is the most universal and the most brutal way in which capitalist recessions initially attack the working class - the capitalist weapon most destructive of the fighting ability of the class unless it is addressed with a fighting programme to oppose all job losses and unite employed and mobilised unemployed to make the bosses' state pay.

- * In answer to short time working or rationalisation of jobs, fight for five days pay whether or not there's five day's work!
- * Ban overtime and consolidate overtime and bonus rates in basic earnings; workers control of work speeds to create new jobs!
- * Fill all vacancies even those left by voluntary redundancies!

* In answer to bosses' claims of inability to pay, direct action to force the bosses to OPEN THE BOOKS of the company to inspection by workers' delegates, to expose the whole history of exploitation by the bosses! Fight to end business secrecy!

* To fight closures, occupy workplaces and seize control of all assets, holding them as ransom to force the bosses' state to expropriate the company! For Nationalisation Without Compensation and under Workers' Control! Fight for class-wide (AND international workers' solidarity in the case of multinationals) to win expropriation of the company and to extend the fight to win state monopoly of the whole industry as the answer to objections about costs, viability and competition!

ORGANISE THE UNEMPLOYED

Not only are the unemployed and their families oppressed in degrading misery by the profit lust of capitalism but they are used to undermine the fight of those at work to maintain their living standards. The lieutenants of capital, the trade union bureaucrats, balance upon this division to preserve their role and facilitate their sellouts of wages with the lie that it will save jobs. In fighting to put the trade union movement on a war footing it is vital to organise the unemployed in the trade union movement, to tie the power of the strong to the weak in the fight for their needs.

Organise an Unemployed Workers Union to fight for these aims!

- * Full rights for the unemployed in the trade unions at nominal rates of subscription; for unemployed branches with full participation in union decision making to fight for the needs of the jobless.
- * For workers laid off en masse to remain organised as fighting unemployed sections.
- * Fight for massive public schemes of useful works in construction, social services, education, creches and nurseries etc. - at union rates of pay and under workers control.
- * For benefits equal to a living wage for every unemployed person willing to work - youth and housewives included!
- * No job - No Rent!
- * For delegations to workplace organisations and meetings to win direct action to take on the unemployed!
- * Unionise all trainee schemes to fight for union rates and control by those in training!

FULL COMPENSATION FOR INFLATION ! FOR REAL WAGE RISES

Inflation is entirely the creation of the crisis of the whole system of capitalism. Since prices began to shoot up again in the early seventies workers' wages have lagged behind in real value and in proportion to productivity increases. Inflation is in no way the responsibility of the working class. The driving down of wages below the value of labour power is at the very heart of the aims of the capitalist offensive. The working class, must therefore put to the centre of all its struggles the development of class-wide unity in defence of wages.

The resolute defence of working class living standards on all fronts leads unavoidably to the political struggle for state power. Only with that perspective can militants have any basis to continue the fight, when individual bosses go bankrupt, by determined action to make the bosses pay, as a class, through state expropriation under workers control. It is vital in conditions of generalised wage restraint to put united class-wide action - and class-wide DEMANDS to the centre of the fightback. Sectional isolation allows the bureaucrats to hold back the majority till convenient "wage norms" are set by courageous sections unable to win their full demands precisely because of that isolation.

- * Fight for full automatic indexation of wages to compensate for price increases. Such a "sliding scale of wages" on the basis of a working class cost of living index to be enforced by workplace action as part of a national rank and file movement.
- * Fight for large catch-up claims on the widest common basis across industries.
- * Fight for a national minimum wage indexed to inflation, the amount to be decided by the trade unions under rank and file control.
- * Fight for Equal Pay for Women NOW!
- * Full pay for workers laid off
- * No to productivity bargaining! Productivity deals are a means of extracting as much as possible out of the smallest possible workforce, leading to speed-ups and the erosion of shop-floor strength. The ever-deepening waves of capitalist crisis despite workers' "sacrifices" at every point give the lie to all claims that improved productivity can bring better living standards for the labouring masses.
- * Consolidate average bonus and overtime earnings in basic pay. For workers inspection and control of production speeds, and an end to business secrecy. Fight for workers' control!

AGAINST PARTITION AND IMPERIALIST RULE

The Working Class must lead the National Struggle

The Partition of Ireland by Imperialism has deepened the divisions in the working class and immeasurably weakened its fighting ability, leaving it prey to petty bourgeois Republicanism, bourgeois nationalism and pro-Imperialist Loyalism. It has imprisoned a divided class in two socially and politically backward statelets dominated throughout by Church and clerical power.

Partition has denied to the people of Ireland as a whole the right of self-determination. It has aborted the fight for that right and set back the possibility of the working class uniting to create its own dictatorship in the fight against the system of capitalist imperialism as a whole.

Concretely, the oppression of the national rights of the Minority in the Six Counties has meant the overt and systematic denial of their civil rights, systematic discrimination against them in all the elementary areas of the fight for survival under capitalism. Their revolt against this oppression proved yet again the impossibility of reforming the Northern state - defended as it is by an armed loyalist camp and the might of the British Army which has murdered anti-imperialist fighters and has jailed them in their thousands.

Only the mobilised class power of the all-Ireland majority of workers in direct action can defend the Six County Minority, open the road to smash the Northern State and win Protestant workers to the banner of socialist revolution against both states.

- * British Troops Out Now!
- * Disband and disarm the RUC and UDR!
- * Free all anti-imperialist prisoners

By fighting for working class action methods on every concrete issue of repression posed by the combined offensive of both states against republicanism and the anti-imperialist struggle, trade-union based united fronts of action must be built under rank and file control to put the fight against British Imperialist terror and Partition on the agenda of the working class struggle for power throughout the island. In practice that may mean at times fighting for joint action with the Republicans.

In this struggle revolutionary communists fight to break the hold of Republicanism and Catholic nationalism over anti-Unionist workers and to arm the movement with the strategy and perspective of Permanent Revolution:- to turn the national struggle into the class war against both states, for the goal of the Workers Republic.

Build a Mass Working-Class based Womens' Movement

We fight for a communist-led independent mass movement of women to lead the fight for their own emancipation. It must be centred on the unions and working class areas, and especially among organised working women and built in struggle around every immediate demand and objective need of women as specially oppressed and doubly exploited:-

- * For Equal Pay and the Right To Work!
- * For free, legal and safe contraception and abortion on demand!
- * For freely available divorce at the request of one partner and adequate state child maintenance.
- * For free preschools and community and workplace creches providing 24-hour cover.
- * For recruitment drives, positive discrimination in training etc., meetings in worktime, the right to consult together separately from male members, to bring women fully into trade union activity.
- * For the most thorough separation of Church and State and school and church!
- * As the best tactical basis to unite serious fighters for women's rights we call for the defeat of the anti-abortion movement by a fight NOW oriented to organised workers for:-
 - i. No to the anti-abortion amendment!
 - ii. Repeal Sections 58-59 of the 1861 Act!
 - iii. For Free Legal and Safe Contraception on Demand!

Against Sectarianism For Workers Unity

While no economic struggle can break Protestant workers in the North from Loyalism, nor break Catholic workers' from illusions in Sinn Fein, every success for open class action across the sectarian divide strengthens the CLASS consciousness of both and the chances for revolutionary communists to explain the connections between capitalist exploitation and imperialist oppression. A vital aid in achieving united action within the Six Counties is the fight for solidarity with the beleaguered Northern working class by an all-Ireland rank and file movement.

The organisational autonomy of the North within the Congress of Trade Unions, engineered by the bureaucracy in the interest of its peaceable wheeler-dealing with the bourgeoisie in the two separate states, is an obstacle to achieving this fighting unity of the Irish working class.

The bureaucracy which accepts the "different situation" of the Protestant State equally has preserved its own Catholic complexion in the South - from the use of Jesuit industrial relations courses to official participations in religious services. In fighting against sectarian division in the Irish working class militants must oppose all such confessional ties, demanding the removal even of the trappings of religious emblems etc. - as a matter of principle in openly establishing by rule, penalties and practice the necessary secular character of the unions.

These trappings are expressions of the barely concealed acceptance by the bureaucracy of Catholic social teaching which is thoroughly counter-revolutionary and bourgeois and which is a major obstacle to putting organised workers at the head of the fight to separate church and state, to end church control of education and hospitals etc. and to ACT on the unions' verbal commitments on divorce, contraception, the Amendment etc. Without such secular democratic demands inscribed on fighting banners of the unions there is no basis to allay the fomented fears of Protestant workers that the Workers Republic is not another form of Rome Rule, and less still any chance of breaking them from the poison of Loyalist sectarianism.

Against Repression For Workers' Defence For Soldiers' Committees

In any deepening industrial confrontation with the bourgeoisie, workers' occupations, pickets and demonstrations, and individual militants, will come under physical attack and harassment by the bourgeoisie's armed bodies of police, army and hired thugs as surely as the ruling class clings to its property, privileges and power. Equally, the military machine of British capitalism already confronts all organised resistance in the North and has proven its readiness to act against militant strikes. Workers' self-defence is a slogan which serious militants must argue for in the struggles of the working class as a strategic need in which Connolly's Citizen Army is an important precedent in Ireland.

Beginning with the fight now against every act of repression, against the use of Special courts and emergency or repressive legislation, against police and military harassment and attacks, the militants of the class must be won to put the fight against repression to the forefront of the mobilisation against the deepening capitalist offensive.

Picket defence squads must be built and developed into trade-union based militias as necessary means of Workers Defence in the coming struggles. That this is not a matter of ultra-left fantasy but a matter of life and death for the working class movement is shown in Chile, Turkey and Poland. Opportunists, Stalinists, Centrists and even the "physical force" Republicans will oppose it outright or equivocate or say "leave it to us". Or at best they will

say it is too soon and provocative to mention even while workers' will to resist is being sapped by the creeping use of army strike breaking, police raids on occupations, jailings, massed police smashing of pickets - which workers will hesitate to resist because they KNOW all too clearly the implications of so doing without deliberate preparation.

- * Abolish emergency laws and no-jury courts and the Forcible Entry & Occupation Act.
- * Disband the Special Branch and defend all activists harrassed by police or arrested under emergency laws.
- * Defy all court action against pickets.
- * Answer bourgeois anti-union laws and the jailing of workers with the immediate and indefinite GENERAL STRIKE!
- * Build picket defence squads!
- * For Trade Union based militias!



Infantry at Dundalk prepare for Border patrol.

While demanding the abolition of ALL "defence" spending the labour movement cannot ignore the existence of the military as the ultimate weapon of the bosses against working class revolt. The trade union and labour movement must be won to fight for a strategy to break rank and file soldiers from the authoritarian control of the ruling-class officers to pave the way for an alliance of rank and file soldiers with the workers movement.

- * For civil and political rights for rank and file soldiers and the right to organise in their own defence independent of the officers.
- * For rank and file soldiers committees!

GENERAL STRIKE

While in all conditions, we advocate the widest solidarity, and specific alliances between sections of workers, e.g. a Public Sector Alliance etc., every centralised offensive by the ruling class, every period of struggle on many fronts by the working class poses the need for united CLASS-WIDE action by workers. In such circumstances we fight for mass strike action and seek to clarify for militants the POLITICAL nature of such action.

The General Strike is the most powerful challenge to the bourgeois state short of the armed insurrection. Even if called on a limited economic demand - e.g. Tax the Rich and Scrap the PRSI Wage Levies - or as a political protest strike, it is objectively a challenge to the state power of the bourgeoisie. It can either succeed in winning these limited aims as a THREAT, if the bourgeoisie is divided or otherwise weak, or else it must take up the full logic of a struggle FOR POWER against the class enemy - concretely, the fight for a Workers Government directly responsible to the working class organisations of struggle.

In either case it makes necessary the building of councils of action, a workers' defence guard, the taking into the control of the workers' organisations of transport, communications, the distribution of food etc. This necessitates a simultaneous struggle on the one hand to force the ICTU to mobilise all the forces of the separate unions and on the other hand to put the elected and recallable delegates of the rank and file in command of those forces. We therefore fight for the ICTU to have authority over all the unions to be able to call a General Strike. In the concrete fight for a General Strike we call for a democratic national strike congress to co-ordinate the struggle and elect an accountable committee, to ward off the danger of sell-outs and betrayals from the union officialdom.

Revolutionary communists fight for the General Strike when it is concretely posed as a NEED of the class struggle. Frequently this means that revolutionaries openly fight for the slogan BEFORE the working class has yet consciously begun to generalise its struggle in this way - in order to raise the sectional struggles to the level of the needs of the class as a whole. The concrete fight for the general strike brings about, as the conditions for its success a time when, in Trotsky's words:-

"the class struggle rises above the particular and craft demands, and extends over all occupational and district divisions, and wipes away the lines between the trade unions and the parties, between legality and illegality, and mobilises the majority of the proletariat in an active opposition to the bourgeoisie and the state".

For this reason the general strike is one of the most revolutionary methods of struggle.

Force Labour out of Coalition Open up the Road of Struggle For a Workers Government!

Workers' direct action against the budget offensives, against social spending cuts, and for public works and expropriation of companies closing down MUST ALSO include the vital demand for Labour and every individual Labour TD and Senator to vote against the austerity measures, budgets and finance bills and to fight in the Dail to advance every need of the struggle of the working class inside and outside parliament.

* FORCE Labour out of Coalition and force the Workers Party out of their attempt to give parliamentary class collaboration a new lease of life under cover of left rhetoric. Demand that they use the Dail platform to mobilise independent working class struggle inside and outside parliament.

* Force the Unions to cut off all support for and ostracise any Labour or Workers Party Dail member who votes for measures attacking the working class. At the same time, in order to press home the political demands of the rank and file on these Parties, to DESTROY them as instruments of the bureaucracy in diverting and choking every political need of the class:-

* Fight to make the unions demand that Labour implements all the norms of workers' democracy:-

- i. Make the official Labour Party directly accountable to the rank and file of the affiliated unions - through representation at Labour Conferences by accountable lay delegates casting their votes, not as a block, but in proportion to the support at rank-and-file controlled Union conferences.
- ii. Election and recallability of all leaders of

the Party by Conference, allowing them keep no more of their salaries than the average wage; votes at Party Conference only for elected delegates of unions and party organisations.

iii. Open the Labour Party to affiliation by all socialist political tendencies committed to the struggles of the class - with full freedom of propaganda within a democratic party and no bans or proscriptions.

Only in the fight for these demands can militants draw in practice for the rank and file the lessons that the treachery of Labour lies in its reformist politics, and that the Union leaders will not stand over any fight to transform it into a genuine workers party. Only thus can workers be confronted with the need for a mass REVOLUTIONARY party that is genuinely of and for the working class in its struggle to finally settle accounts with the bourgeoisie.

- * Fight to maintain and develop the political levy on union members, putting it under the control of a fighting union movement accountable at every level to the rank and file.
- * Fight for conferences of every Union and the ICTU - with only mandated and elected lay delegates voting - to press home the demands of the rank and file on Labour and the Workers Party. Force the union leaders to open up democratic debate at every level on what kind of Party the working class needs.
- * In that debate revolutionary communists fight for a programme of struggle, for workers' direct action, for the use of Parliament at every point to strictly serve the needs of that struggle, to smash the capitalist offensive and establish a Workers Government as a transition to the workers state.

Such a Workers Government (and Small Farmers) Government must be one directly accountable to the democratic Action Committees and workers councils; it must stand over every gain of the masses in struggle; it must begin to dismantle the coercive apparatus of the ruling class and expropriate all bosses threatening to lay off workers; it must arm militias of the class organisations for their own defence of every gain. The fight for such a Workers Government can be a means of uniting revolutionary workers in struggle with those not yet committed to the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state.

The experience of the struggle for such a Workers Government would (possibly without having to actually create such a Government) in practice prove that it is impossible to defend the gains of the working class as long as the institutions of bourgeois rule survive - army, police, Special Branch, courts, judiciary, parliament, senior civil service etc., along with the continued private and transnational ownership of the major means of production.

Therefore revolutionary communists fight to weld the vanguard of the class into a mass communist Party to make the fight for a Workers Government a step to the overthrow of the capitalist state and the expropriation of capital, to replace it with the dictatorship of the proletariat. This republic of workers councils would nationalise all land and capital, create a state monopoly of foreign trade and institute workers control and a democratically planned economy. It would rigorously impose all the norms of workers democracy as the guarantee against bureaucratic degeneration. It would give unconditional support to the struggles of workers and oppressed peoples throughout the world - as a step to international socialism.

International Solidarity

Within all labour and trade union organisations the fight must be taken up, independent of the present Church-based solidarity committees, for unconditional support for the FMLN against the U.S. puppet regime in El Salvador and for Nicaragua in their war with the U.S. backed 'contras' and their allies.

- * Break off all diplomatic relations with the U.S.!
- * For trade union links with the FMLN and the Sandinista Government.
- * For unconditional arms and economic aid to the FMLN and the Sandinistas!

At the same time the fight of workers for the right to independently organise against the stalinist bureaucracies in the degenerate Workers States must be put to the fore in building the working class fight for its class power internationally.

- * Black all imports from Poland to force the regime to recognise the right of Solidarnosc and of independent workers, small farmers and soldiers committees, and the right of working class parties to organise!

The counter-revolutionary bureaucracies of the degenerated Workers States must be overthrown by the political revolution led by the organised working class. No quarter must be given to imperialist designs for the reconquest of those countries by capitalism!

- * Defend the USSR against the imperialist Cold War offensive!

FOR A NEW LENINIST - TROTSKYIST INTERNATIONAL

To-day's action programme must be one to mobilise the rank and file beginning with the most immediate attacks of the bosses and imperialism. It must at the same time be a programme, a manual of action, which when taken up and fought for leads the working class to organise politically under the lead of its own Party for workers' power based on armed democratic workers' councils.

In that fight the most combative workers must be welded into a revolutionary rank and file movement based in the trade union organisations, initially as a revolutionary minority. Within that fight the IWG seeks to win the most class-conscious militants to build the nucleus of a Revolutionary Trotskyist party. To that end the IWG is irrevocably committed to polemic, debate and discussion for revolutionary regroupment of all genuine revolutionary socialists.

The only consistently revolutionary tradition in which the building of such a Party can be rooted is that of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky and expressed in the first four congresses of the Communist International up to 1923 and of the Fourth International from 1938 up till 1948.

The building of a new revolutionary international for world socialism is an indispensable part of that fight which cannot be postponed on any pretence. All programmes rooted in the national terrain ultimately capitulate to the 'national interest' - the maintenance of the institutions of bourgeois class rule and of bourgeois property. The revolutionary programme proceeds always from the international perspective of the working class. Only the fight for a revolutionary internationalist programme can therefore provide the instrument for a revolutionary workers party in Ireland that cannot be compromised in its fight for the Workers Republic as a step to international socialism. ●

MARXISTS ANALYSE THE GENERAL STRIKE

ROSA LUXEMBURG and the MASS STRIKE

THE TACTIC of the General strike originated in the British Radical and early Trade Union movement of the nineteenth century. But after the demise of Chartism in 1848 discussion of the tactic disappeared until the anarchists of the First International, led by the Russian Bakunin, brought the issue again to the forefront.

Their understanding of the general strike, as being synonymous with the social revolution, provoked a scathing response from the Marxist wing of the International.

For the Anarchists the mere absence from work on a national scale would bring capitalism to a halt, in which event the working class could simply step in and take over. The Bakuninists, interested in grand schemes, but with a traditional sectarian contempt for reality, had failed to draw any of the vital lessons that Marx did from the experience of the Paris Commune in 1871.

The anarchist version of the general strike took no account of the armed, coercive power of the capitalist state. It would not simply disappear as industry came to a halt. On the contrary it would become ever more vigorous in its attempts to smash the working class. For Marx and Engels the idea of being able to simply 'step in' was absurd and fatal. This led them to reject the General Strike as a method of struggle that existed only in the fantasies of the sectarians.

It was not until 1893 that the Marxists were able to perceive that the tactic could be used in a way beneficial to the working class - in its revolutionary training and for its revolutionary goal. It was in the small, but relatively highly industrialised country of Belgium that the General, or Mass Strike as Luxemburg called it, revealed itself as a genuinely proletarian method of struggle.

The Belgian Labour Party, affiliated to the Second International, rallied a working class movement, born out of a series of mass strikes that had raged in the 1880s, around the slogan of universal and equal suffrage. In an attempt to win that demand the Labour Party led a General Strike in 1891 that rocked the ruling Clerical Party and forced them to grant a revision of the Constitution. A follow-up to this took place in 1893 when 250,000 workers, almost the entire organised Belgian working class, struck. The result was the hasty granting by the Chamber of Deputies of universal but unequal suffrage - property holders had more than one vote so a right wing majority in Parliament was guaranteed.

In response to this mass political strike movement Engels revised the one-sided notion that the Marxists had previously held, and offered an analysis that envisaged different types of general strikes.

"You yourself remark that the barricades have become antiquated (they may, however, prove useful should the army turn a third or two-fifths socialist and the question arise of providing it with the opportunity to turn its bayonets) but the political strike must prove victorious immediately, by the threat alone (as in Belgium where the army

1: The Early Years

BELGIUM; RUSSIA; GERMANY

was very shaky) or it must end in fiasco or, finally, lead directly to the barricades".
- Letter from Engels to Kautsky, November 1893.

Potential

The concrete experience of 1891 and 1893 made possible a broadening of the Marxist grasp of the General Strike. Its potential as a means of political proletarian struggle was glimpsed. But it was left to the revolutionary Marxists of the next generation, primarily Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky, to refine and develop what Engels had only hinted at.

The suffrage question in Belgium was not finally settled in 1893. The task of winning equal voting rights remained. In 1902 yet another general strike was launched by the sturdy Belgian Labour movement. In the intervening years, however, the Labour Party, having won 24 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, had grown used to struggle only on the parliamentary plane. Indeed, the leaders had found common cause with the bourgeois Liberal Party who had been squeezed out of any share of political power by the ruling Clerical Party. So, a parliamentary alliance was hatched and an all-class 'opposition' formed. The price of this deal was that the Labour Party agreed to drop the demand for women's suffrage from its programme.

When the 1902 strike broke out the Labour Party was tainted by a rotten compromise with the class enemy. In Parliament the Clericals, now confident of the reliability of the army, refused to budge on the suffrage issue and defeated the opposition. The Liberals' response to this was typically electoral. Feeling the pinch of the strike they declared

"We Liberals salute the calm and disciplined behaviour of the strikers, but would call on them to go back to work so as not to suffer needlessly. The next elections will see the victory of the opposition".

- Luxemburg on Belgium. First translated in Permanent Revolution No. 1.

Vandervelde, the leader of the Labour Party, actually praised this declaration and orchestrated an about turn in his own party. On Saturday 19th April, the party declared its total support for the 'sacred' strike - and on Sunday 20th April it issued a call to end it! Vandervelde went even further and appealed to the King to resolve the constitutional crisis. The result of this treachery was the defeat and demoralisation of the Belgian labour movement and the tying of the labour Party to the bourgeoisie in an alliance that became unshakeable.

It was Rosa Luxemburg who fired the major polemical broadside against the Belgian Party. Parliamentarianism had been the dominant tactic within the Second International during the period of its consolidation in the 1890s.

But that trend was becoming transformed from an expedient tactical line for a specific period into a definite overall strategy. Luxemburg and the left of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) began their fight against this drift by arguing that the mass strike was of crucial importance as a tactic because it represented the "masses in motion". Instead of passive reliance on the work, no matter how conscientious, of Social Democratic Deputies, the German

28

left grasped the importance of the mass strike as a central tactic in the struggle for Socialism - one that drew on the energy and organisation of the working class itself.

Guarantee

The Belgian Party defended its actions by appealing to the forward march of history. That the general strike had been called off did not matter one way or the other because history guaranteed a victory for socialism at some stage. Here we see the bankruptcy of the Second International's gradualism that was to reveal itself so starkly and treacherously in August 1914, when the Social Democrats supported their native bourgeoisies in the imperialist holocaust.

Luxemburg saw, in the line adopted by the Belgians, a failure to use the Marxist method in relation to actual class struggle and a political cowardice in the face of the enemy. She argued "Generalities to the effect that, in the final analysis, the course of history is biased in our direction ought not to be applied when analysing any specific episode of our class struggle".

In other words, Socialism tomorrow is little comfort for a working class suffering defeats at the hands of capitalism today. The task addressed by Luxemburg was how to weld the day to day battles of the working class against capitalist attacks into an active offensive for the destruction of capitalism itself.

Here Luxemburg was striking a blow at the sterile evolutionist orthodoxy that was current in the Second International and manifested itself most clearly in the divide between a maximum programme (eventual Socialism) and a minimum programme (the routine day to day struggle for reforms and improvements in the here and now). These programmes were never linked in the Second International's undialectical scheme.

Fig-leaf

Vandervelde's talk of future Socialism was a fig leaf to cover his cowardice and his treachery. Immediately after the Parliamentary defeat at a time when 300,000 workers were on strike and locked in a resolute battle with the Belgian State, he declared that the strike was 'now doomed'. For the reformist this legal defeat automatically meant doom for the mass strike.

Luxemburg saw in this refusal to fight, a trait so typical of reformists and vacillators, a bureaucrat's fear of stepping beyond prescribed limits and a lack of faith in the will of the masses. The working class were declared beaten before they had even seriously entered the battle. Vandervelde had tied the mass strike to legality from the outset - and therefore legality won.

In the same way the British trade union bureaucrats in the general strike of 1926 were able to cripple the struggle in advance. From the first day of the strike the right wing TUC leader JH Thomas argued that it was not a political strike, and he later gave thanks that the 'constitution' had won in the struggle with the working class he was supposed to represent.

In the Belgian strike Luxemburg saw clearly what Engels had earlier hinted at. The mass strike need not merely be a pressure lever, a threat subordinated to parliamentary action, but can become the corridor to the revolution. It is not the revolution itself but in bringing the working class into the head on clash with the capitalists and their state, it poses revolution - which class shall rule in society - as the logical outcome. She criticised the Belgian Party for refusing to use the strike in this fashion:

"A general strike that has in advance had fastened to it the fetters of legality is like an artillery demonstration that begins with the shot being thrown into the water in front of the enemy's very eyes ... And the general strike remained ineffective because behind it in turn there was no threat of the actions of the mass movement following its unrestricted logic - no spectre of revolution".

- Luxemburg on Belgium.

At root the Labour Party's failure resided in its sacrifice of proletarian independence to the Liberal Party. The logic of parliamentarianism was parliamentary deals. Inevitably the Labour Party, frustrated in being a constant minority in the chamber, wanted to seek a short cut to power. The Liberals were the perfect ally in this attempt. Like the Labour Party they were in a minority and were in favour of reforms that seemed to place them well to the left of the Clerical Party. But the Liberals were a bourgeois party and as such had independent class interests, bourgeois interests to defend. Not only would proletarian needs and interests clash with these, but so too would the working class method of struggling for its needs.

The strike hits at the pockets of the capitalists, and this meant hitting at the pockets of Liberal Party members. The mass strike hit their pockets as well as those of the Clerical Party. The Liberals' response was to turn the screws on Vandervelde whom they had embroiled in their orbit. Lacking the politics or the will to break the alliance Vandervelde sacrificed the struggle of the working class. Just as thousands of workers were flooding into the strike movement the Socialist fraction in the Chamber and in the Executive of the Labour Party called the strike off.

ROSA LUXEMBURG



Luxemburg explained why, and in so doing demonstrated the centrality of the mass strike as an independent PURELY working class action:

"The explanation for the contradictory and hesitant actions of the Belgian Party leaders can be found in their position of middle men half-way between the workers storming into battle and the Liberal bourgeois trying to hold them back for all they are worth". (- Same article.)

The crucial lesson of the Belgian defeat of 1902 is not that the general strike is no good as a weapon of class struggle but that defeats will always follow when the working class movement is tied, by its leaders, to the interests of the class enemy.

Russia 1905

If the Belgian events exploded some of the myths and prejudices that had previously surrounded the question of the mass strike, then it was the strike wave in Russia that culminated in the revolution of 1905 that placed it beyond doubt at the centre of the Marxist armoury of tactics. Luxemburg was quick to respond to these events attempting to feed their significance and lessons into German Social Democracy in her pamphlet "The Mass Strike, The Political Party and The Trade Unions" in 1906. Here she codified many of her earlier thoughts on the general strike.

Explosion

Czarist Russia possessed a seemingly backward working class. It was a tiny minority in a predominantly peasant country. To the orthodox 'Marxists' of the Second International it seemed the least likely place for an explosion of major class battles. Yet, in October 1905, out of a strike by a group of printworkers over a purely economic issue, a mass strike movement developed that rocked the very foundations of Russian absolutism. The strike movement began as a patchwork of economic struggles. Its political coalescence came largely as a result of the unifying influence of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers Deputies, a workers' council that was born in the struggle itself. In this movement the working class found themselves striving to carry through the democratic tasks that had in the past, and most typically so in France in 1789, been carried through by the bourgeoisie.

But they went beyond these tasks and gave voice as well to their own demands - most notably for the 8 hour day. Thus the Russian events brought the direct struggle for power by the proletariat to the centre of the world's political stage - they heralded the opening of the epoch of socialist revolution. This was something that Luxemburg partially grasped. She argued that though the tasks of the Russian revolution were democratic they were being carried out in a historical milieu very different to France in 1789. As such the outcome of the mass strike need not be confined to the rigid dictates of the dogmatists - the struggle could go beyond the democratic tasks: " 'Revolution' like 'mass strike' signifies nothing but an external form of the class struggle which can have sense and meaning only in connection with definite political situations."

- Luxemburg's pamphlet.

Actual

Like Trotsky, who argued that the 'truth was always concrete' Luxemburg turns her eye to the actual, the specific, not contenting herself with general truisms as her guide to action.

German Social Democracy was forced to take account of the Russian events. At its 1905 Congress at Jena the party agreed in principle to the use of the Mass Strike in the event of any attack on voting rights. This was obviously a limited notion of the mass strike, curtailed even further in reality by the fact that at a Congress in Cologne in the May previous to the Jena Congress the German Trade Unions had voted against even discussing the question of the mass strike.

In 1906 the social democratic leaders made a secret deal with the union leaders that the Jena decision would never be implemented. In her pamphlet then Luxemburg was, despite Jena, arguing against the entire leadership of the German Labour movement.

Everything in Luxemburg's account of the mass strike demonstrates why the official leadership feared it so much. First of all she pointed out that the mass strike was something that grew, spontaneously, out of economic class struggle. It was not something that the leadership could simply name a day for. This was because of the inner nature of the mass strike itself. As a spontaneous movement it moved like a wave, sweeping all before it and pulling in many behind it. It stretched beyond the organised movement, pulling the unorganised, the non-party and non-unionised masses, the communities, the lower middle class - all the toiling masses.

Such a movement with its own logic, its own unfolding demands, and throwing up its own leaders, challenges the prerogative of the old union and party leaders to control it. As such it challenges the existence of that leadership - it raises the need for a new leadership, one that has the interests of the strike as its own, a revolutionary leadership:

"An artificially arranged demonstration of the urban proletariat, taking place once, a mere mass strike action arising out of discipline, and directed by the conductor's baton of a party executive could there fore leave the broad masses of the people cold and indifferent. But a powerful and reckless fighting action of the industrial proletariat born of a revolutionary situation must surely react upon the deeper lying layers, and ultimately draw all those into a stormy general economic struggle who in normal times stand aside from the daily union fight".

- The Mass Strike.

For Luxemburg the notion that you had to wait until you had finished the organising, until you had all the masses carrying party or union cards, before you could call for the mass strike was hopeless pedantry. As Luxemburg put it most graphically:

"And while the bureaucrats of the German Labour Movement rummage in their office drawers for information as to their strength and maturity, they do not see that that which they seek is lying before their eyes in a great historical revolution, because historically considered, the Russian Revolution is a reflex of the power and maturity of the International and, therefore, in the first place of the German Labour Movement." - The Mass Strike (1906).

Her sharp dialectical thinking showed her that organisation was in fact a result of struggle and was there to serve future struggles, not as the right wing were arguing, the other way round. Probably the most important lesson that Luxemburg drew from the Russian events was the perception of the interaction of economic and political struggle in a mass strike. Strikes rarely begin as conscious political actions. More usually they are centred around economic demand for higher wages, better conditions etc. However, a number of such strikes, coalescing, invariably begin to develop common goals, goals that are devoted to meeting immediate needs but in so doing stretch beyond the narrow sectional interests from which they spring.

Obstacles

Further, a united fight for these goals will bring workers up against political obstacles - the capitalist army and police force, an economic crisis, bankrupt firms and so on - such obstacles can only be dealt with in a political way and so political factors mingle with the economic in the mass strike situation. Luxemburg described this relation between economic demands and political struggle in 'The Mass Strike':

"The economic struggle is the transmitter from one political centre to another, the political struggle is the periodic fertilisation of the soil for economic struggle."

In the mass strike the everyday, the routine, the narrow patterns are all shattered and replaced with the broader horizons of a whole class on the move, fighting for the future. It is this dynamic of the mass strike, this breaking of the traditional barriers between the political and the economic that gives it a powerful revolutionary potential. It can go beyond even its own professed aims - it pits class against class and therefore asks the decisive question - who rules society? The full logic of this was not fully elaborated by Luxemburg but she paved the way for a Marxist grasp of the general strike question by asking all the right questions and, albeit sometimes implicitly, drawing the correct conclusions.

Prussia 1910

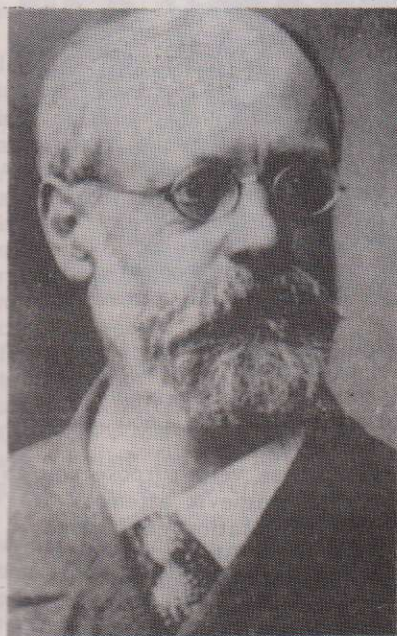
The general strike question was posed concretely for German Social Democracy in 1910. In the debate that took place Luxemburg showed a clear-sightedness and trust in the strength of the masses, in their will and energy whereas Karl Kautsky, once the 'pope' of Marxism now fast heading to the camp of the opportunists, could offer nothing but an electoral perspective for the masses. An article entitled 'The Next Step' by Luxemburg was published in March 1910 in the paper the Dortmund Arbeiterzeitung.

Prelude

This was not a major Social Democratic organ, but the article had been refused publication in all the main journals and papers of the Party.

In Prussia in 1910 the state launched an attack on the working class's right to vote. Luxemburg argued that this was a prelude to an all out attack on the rights of the entire German working class. As such it demanded a generalised response. Social Democracy confined the fightback to a round of huge street demonstrations - a protest campaign. These demonstrations mobilised thousands and proved that, given a proper lead, large sections of the proletariat were willing to fight. Faced with the failure of the demonstrations, despite their size, to achieve any concrete results from the Junker militarist state (the Junkers were the landowning class in Germany) Luxemburg asked the question 'What Next?'. Her answer was unequivocal - the Mass Strike to defend suffrage rights.

Karl Kautsky



This alone could weld the class into a force capable of defeating the militarist state. She repeated in this article and in the ones that followed, many of the main points made in her earlier pamphlet. The movement had to be coalesced as it was arising; it could not be seen in an exclusively 'political or 'economic' light. But the opportunities were tremendous, as was borne out by the increasing size of each demonstration.

But, eventually, with no resolute leadership, with nowhere to go from where it was, the movement petered out and a great opportunity was lost.

Kautsky had been unwilling to have the debate with Luxemburg on the Mass strike since it posed the awkward problem of the secret deal to junk the Jena decision at the precise moment when that decision should have been implemented. Despite censorship Luxemburg did manage to draw Kautsky out and forced him to answer her arguments. Kautsky in an article called 'What Now?' gave an alternative perspective to that outlined by Luxemburg. After developing an elaborate theory of the war of attrition, a war of delaying tactics until the working class was so well organised that it could enter the final decisive battle certain of victory, he stated what all this meant in relation to the Prussian events:

It threatens to make next year's general election a terrible day of judgement for the Prussian Junkers and their allies or semi allies. Their statisticians already recognise the possibility that we will win 125 seats in the coming elections ... We have the key to this momentous historical situation, overwhelming victory in coming Reichstag elections, already in our pockets through the whole combination of circumstances. Only one thing would lead to us losing it and ruining this tremendous situation: an act of stupidity on our part." - Karl Kautsky, 'What Now?'

Stupidity of course meant relying on the strength of the working class and on its ability to fight for itself with its own tools of struggle. This 'wait for the election' strategy, echoing the mistakes of Vandervelde in Belgium, not only paved the way for the betrayal of 1914 but also set a grim precedent for traitors inside the workers movement. In 1968 in France when 10 million workers were involved in the biggest (till then) General Strike in history the stalinists faithfully parroted Kautsky; for example the Morning Star, 1st June 1968:

"... the Communists would enter the electoral battle with confidence and called on everyone to guard against giving any opening to provocations wherever they might come from ...".

Derailed

Such a strategy inevitably loses. It derails and therefore demoralises the mass movement. It perpetrates the reformist myth that Parliament is a neutral forum which the working class could use for its own ends. Marxists have a name for such a strategy - parliamentary cretinism. Luxemburg's answer to this feature of the Right in social democracy in her time was clear:

"We live at a time in which no more advantages can be gained in parliament for the proletariat. This is why the masses themselves must enter the theatre of action" (The Next Step, Selected Writings, ed. Robert Looker). Written in 1910 these words ring as true now as they must have done then, just seven years before the victorious working class revolution in Russia.

Luxemburg's major weakness was that she overestimated the potential of spontaneity. Her malefactors and her false friends both overplay this aspect of her politics. In fact, in her writings on the mass strike, she always argued that the role of the party was to lead the mass strike politically. However, she did not, and to some extent could not, see that a mass strike without a revolutionary party at its head driving it forward along its logical path, needn't result in catastrophic defeat, but would not lead to revolutionary victory either.

Burned

This lesson has been burned into the collective memory of revolutionary communism after the experiences of Britain in 1926 and France in 1936 and 1968 where tremendous mass strikes have been defeated or demobilised by the reformist and stalinist misleaders who stood at their head. Even here Luxemburg's emphasis on spontaneity is historically justified. She was fighting the schematism, the lifeless view of socialism and struggle being propagated by the parliamentarians in the Second International. Her passionate defence of the masses in motion against this was an important factor in developing a revolutionary wing inside social democracy. But it did lead to a lack of clarity as to how revolutionaries should prepare and agitate for the general strike and what they should do in general strike situations to win leadership.

It was left to Trotsky to argue clearly and precisely for new forms of organisation to run the strike, for defence measures and for the sort of agitation necessary to weld the disparate slogans of mass strike movements into ones clearly focussed and class wide in their content.

THE GENERAL STRIKE:

Russia 1905

January 9th : One of the many
marches converging on the
Winter Palace: Bloody Sunday.



In the winter of 1904 the Russian Autocracy faced an acute political crisis. Tsar Nicholas II faced defeat after defeat in an Imperialist war with Japan in Manchuria. On December 20th, Port Arthur, the chief Russian naval base in the Far East, surrendered to the Japanese.

The crisis of Tsarism strengthened all the long-suppressed currents of opposition to the tyrannical regime. The liberal bourgeoisie mobilised a campaign of protest meetings calling for a constitution. The regime was faced with peasant disorder, mutinies in the army and navy and an upsurge of strikes.

At the huge Putilov heavy metallurgical works a strike over the dismissal of workers who had joined a semi-legal workers society spread rapidly. The group to which they belonged was led by the priest Father Gapon and had been founded with the approval of the police chief Zubatov. The strike focussed on economic demands - the 8 hour day, a new wage scale agreed by the workers' own representatives, a minimum wage for unskilled and women workers, creches in the factory, abolition of searches and fines for lateness etc.

Father

The pressure of the strike forced Father Gapon to mobilise a huge demonstration for 9th January. He gave it the religious form of a procession to petition the Tsar, "the little father", for the redress of grievances. But the demands the workers' meetings put into the petition were far from patriarchal and included amnesty for political prisoners, freedom of speech, press, assembly, separation of church and state, an end to the war, a constituent assembly. Some 20,000 took part in the processions to the Winter Palace where the massed rifles of the guards poured volley after volley into the unarmed people. Hundreds were killed, thousands wounded. These volleys shattered the illusions of Petersburg's workers, even the most benighted by Tsarism. They also fatally undermined the police-sponsored workers' organisations, opening up the mass of workers to socialist influence.

The Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) was split into two factions - Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Outside of and between the organised factions were prominent individuals like Leon Trotsky who did not fit into either camp.

The Bolshevik faction whose very purpose was to defend the party against the Menshevik attempts to loosen and dilute the party organisation emphasised the need to destroy Tsarism after Bloody Sunday. Lenin, writing in the official Bolshevik paper *Vperod* noted:

"The lessons of Bloody Sunday cannot pass without some influence on the masses. Now the demand for the Constituent Assembly has to become the main slogan of all Russian workers. And the practical programme of the day must be to supply the population with arms and to organise armed revolutionary action, in order to destroy the existing ruling power and all its institutions."

In fact the initial effect of Bloody Sunday was not a straight passage to political strike action. A massive railway strike at Saratov on the Volga on 12th January won the nine hour day and consolidated the railway workers' union, an important factor in the coming year since it potentially put the key communications in the workers' hands. Strikes of this sort erupted across the length and breadth of Russia. At Ivanovo-Voznessensk, a huge textile town, 50,000 workers stayed out for two months. Their city-wide strike committee was in fact the first soviet (council) of workers' deputies.

The Bolsheviks' response to the economic strikes, which often incorporated political questions into their list of demands, was negative at first. They denounced the strikes as anarchistic. Lunacharsky in May 1905 described "a spontaneous strike over economic demands" as the weapon of a "still backward proletariat" saying that the Moscow Bolsheviks were quite right to be actively "discouraging disorganised striking at present". To such actions he flatly counterposed "a political mass strike" adding that even as far as this was concerned "we can conceive of it only in conjunction with an armed uprising".

Correct as the Bolsheviks were to point out that Tsarism could only be smashed by an armed uprising, and that it was the duty of the social-democrats to prepare this, they failed to see in the mass strikes, and in the political general strike precisely the tactics to mobilise, educate and organise the masses. Without the consciousness gained in struggle for a whole series of demands necessarily involving basic economic ones, and passing on to political ones, the need to overthrow the Autocracy would never become a mass demand.

Vanguard

Without developed and perfected organisation - workers' delegates, strike committees, the soviets, there could be no link between the vanguard of party members and the class.

The Mensheviks, on the other hand, were looking for every way possible to link up with, even dissolve into, the masses. For them the question of the armed insurrection remained a distant one - one of preparation only. The Bolsheviks' views, in the words of Axelrod, the senior theoretician of Menshevism, were a "conspiratorial-insurrectionary mixture of anarchist and Blanquist tendencies, dressed up in the terminology of Marxism or Social-Democracy". Whilst he recognised that a rising or risings might become necessary "the party as such, as a political unit, can and should prepare itself and the working masses for that battle by political means and not military, technical, or conspiratorial ones." Against the Bolsheviks Axelrod argued for "an all-Russian workers' Congress". Martov, another leading Menshevik, was also arguing for the forming of "organs of proletarian self-government".

Both of these Menshevik leaders were guided by wrong perspectives - the Russian Revolution was a bourgeois revolution which would transfer political power to the bourgeoisie. The working class had to render assistance to this task but maintain its own class independence and organisations. For both Axelrod and Martov the 'normal party' was a mass East European party, like the German Social Democracy bound up or linked to mass trade unions. The "workers' congress" in their view could act as a basis for fusing the illegal, conspiratorial RSDLP into it to form a 'real' labour party.

Trotsky agreed wholly with neither the Bolsheviks nor the Mensheviks as to the likely development of the Russian revolution. With the Bolsheviks he believed that the liberal bourgeoisie could not lead the revolution. Moreover, "apart from social-democracy there is nobody on the battlefield of the revolution" capable of giving that leadership. Lenin believed that social-democracy must lead the insurrection, must take governmental power - but not alone. The petit-bourgeois revolutionary democracy, representing and leading the peasants must share the power. Further, the workers' party in government could not entertain the thought of socialist measures. The broadest, democratic freedoms must be the whole gamut of its programme. Here Trotsky disagreed. To the astonishment of most social-democrats he endorsed the view first stated by Parvus that "The Revolutionary Provisional Government of Russia will be the government of a workers democracy ... (it) will be social democratic."

Trotsky also held that such a government resting on an alliance with the peasants to solve the land question, inevitably faced with capitalist and landlord sabotage and lock-outs would have to violate the rights of private property, confiscate factories and thus necessarily pass on consciously to 'socialist'

33 not merely 'democratic' tasks.

Insurrection

Trotsky differed most sharply from Lenin and the Bolsheviks on the question of the party. Influenced by the West European model and by Luxemburg's stress on the spontaneous organising capabilities of the proletariat in action, he was not to find his way to Lenin's party till 1917. The strengths of Trotsky's overall perspective, of working class power, his tactical flexibility faced with the direct action and initiative of the masses, allowed him to play a prominent role in the climax of the Revolution. He drew from this experience the most systematic understanding of the general strike and its organisational expression, the workers' council - the basis for armed insurrection to achieve a workers government. The missing element was however, the party. Without this even a brilliant revolutionary tribune like Trotsky could not, at crucial moments, lead or mobilise the masses to decisive victory.

The strike wave abated in the summer and burst out on a new and massive scale in October. Started by the railway workers as a response to the arrest of a meeting of their delegates, it spread from one major centre to another, until it reached general strike proportions. In Moscow by the 10th October and St. Petersburg by 12th and 13th, the cities were at a standstill. It focussed openly on political demands, freedom of assembly, the press, the right to organise and for a constituent assembly to draw up a constitution. The strike gained the support of the middle class, even the shops closed in protest. Some employers even compensated their employees for time lost by the strike. The Constitutional Democrats (Kadets) the major party of the Russian bourgeoisie, declared their support for the strike. Nicholas II found himself isolated in his palace, the huge repressive apparatus of the Tsarist state was paralysed.

In these circumstances the most urgent need was to coordinate the strike, to make it total by denying the state forces transport, telegraph links, newspapers, whilst at the same time mobilising these resources for the strikes. The answer was a St Petersburg strike committee - a council of workers' deputies, the Soviet. The initiative came from the Mensheviks in the city. On October 10th they called for the election of a "workers committee". For the next three days delegates were elected in the plants (one per 500 workers). Its first meeting on October 13th gathered together 40 deputies. The next day its size had more than doubled whilst on the third it numbered 226 representatives from 96 factories and 5 trade unions in addition to 3 representatives each from the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. On the 17th October it took the name Soviet Rabochi Deputatov (Council of Workers Deputies), elected an executive committee of 22 and decided to publish a daily paper, Izvestia (news).

Soviet

On the very same day the Tsar was finally forced to make concessions. At first they appeared very significant. In a 'manifesto' he promised "to grant the people the immutable foundations of civil liberty - inviolability of the person and freedom of conscience, speech, assembly and union." Furthermore, he promised a State Duma (parliament) which he said would eventually embody "the principle that no law shall take effect without the approval of the State Duma." The Soviet, whilst it recognised the enormous confession of weakness embodied in the declaration of

Nicholas the Hangman, warned the proletariat:

"We have been given freedom of assembly, but our assemblies are encircled by troops. We have been given freedom of speech, but censorship remains inviolate. We have been given personal immunity but the prisons are filled to overflowing with prisoners."

Rejecting the Tsar's Manifesto, the Soviet immediately demanded a total amnesty for political prisoners, the withdrawal of all troops from the city, the dismissal of the notorious police chief Trepov, and expressed its total no-confidence in the new ministry headed by Count Witte. The strike was continued until October 22nd when it was ceremoniously terminated by huge funeral rallies in honour of those killed by the soldiers during the strike.

The 'good faith' of the Tsar and the reactionary court clique was quickly revealed for what it was in the mushrooming, under police encouragement of Black Hundreds, recruited - in Trotsky's words - from "the petty shop keeper, the beggar, the publican and his perennial clients, the janitor and the police spy, the professional thief and the amateur housebreaker, the small artisan and the brothel door keeper." This sub-proletarian rabble was encouraged to organise pogroms against the Jews, to assault strikers and trade unionists and the socialist press. Its aim was to form a mass social base for reaction - in short many of the functions fascism was to perform in 'advanced' western Europe after the First World War. Throughout Russia, some three to four thousand perished in these pogroms. In Petersburg, however, no pogrom took place. The Soviet formed armed fighting detachments some 6,000 strong which broke up the scum before a pogrom could be organised. Regular night patrols were instituted and the working class press guarded.

The Soviet naturally became the focus and the forum for political debate as to the next steps, the way forward to achieve both democratic rights and the workers' own class demands. Here the views and programmes of the organised socialists came to the fore - the Mensheviks, Bolsheviks and individuals like Trotsky.

The Bolsheviks understood more sharply than anyone else that the Tsar's regime - its police and military apparatus had to be overthrown by armed insurrection. Further they realised that a firm disciplined party was essential to act as the general staff and cadre of this insurrection. But at first the Bolsheviks adopted a one-sided, tactically inflexible attitude to the general strike and to the soviet of workers' deputies. Thus, their Petersburg Committee only decided to call for a general strike on the night of 12th/13th October when it was already well underway, ordering its mystified agitators before that to "clarify the pros and cons of striking".

The first reaction by Bolshevik leaders to the soviet was suspicious, indeed hostile. Krasikov warned agitators against "this new intrigue by the Mensheviks ... a non-party Zubatovite (i.e. police provocateur) committee". Bogdanov the leading Bolshevik in Russia saw it as the nucleus of an anti-socialist labour party and decided that the Bolsheviks must force it to accept the Party's programme and the tactical guidance of the central committee. The soviet should "ultimately dissolve in the party". If the Soviet refused then the Bolsheviks would walk out and "expose its anti-proletarian character before the proletarian masses." This ultimatum was submitted on 29th October. The Soviet declined to even debate it. Abashed, the Bolsheviks kept their seats.

Trotsky was soon widely recognised as the ideological leader of the soviet. He gave it the political perspective of developing links with the mutineers in the army and navy, of support for Polish resistance to martial law. He repeatedly explained and politically prepared for the armed insurrection. But the Soviet was of necessity a limited body for this purpose since it was a public body. Secrecy, conspiratorial methods are vital to the technical and organisational preparation of an armed insurrection. Without a party this was not possible. Likewise the Soviet leadership's links with the masses were sufficient for a direct revolutionary advance. But difficult manoeuvres, even a retreat, presented problems that could only be solved by a party which had disciplined cadres in every workshop, well-respected and known. Of course no party - not the Bolsheviks - had this yet. But Lenin's first concern was to bend all the energies of his cadres in this direction.

The struggle for the eight hour day burst out spontaneously lasting from October 31st to November 12th. It started as an attempt to impose the reduction in hours by direct action (i.e. by stopping work after 8 hours). The employers replied by lock-outs. In two weeks the workers were exhausted and the Soviet, with bitterness of heart, had to order a retreat.

Deprived

Parallel to this lock out struggle the Soviet called a six day general strike to protest against the government's threat to execute naval mutineers at Kronstadt and the imposition of martial law in Poland. Here again, impressive and militant as the strike was at its commencement, exhaustion set in and a retreat had to be ordered when the government had only made a half concession which spared the sailors' lives and announced the future end of martial law. The government, sensing the time was right to put an end to the divided authority in the capital, struck



Living vindication of both Luxemburg's and Trotsky's arguments. The first ever Soviet of Workers' Deputies, Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Russia, 1905.

at the Soviet on November 26th arresting Krustalev-Nosar its chairman. Trotsky, long the most militant single figure, succeeded him but the Soviet's days were numbered. On December 3rd the whole Executive Committee plus two hundred deputies were arrested. The strike which followed petered out - this time after only a few days. Deprived of its leadership the Petersburg proletariat were incapable of maintaining a general strike or transforming it into a rising.

The situation in Moscow differed considerably from that of Petersburg. In this ancient capital factories were smaller than the mighty works of Petersburg (Putilov alone had approximately 30,000 workers). The result was that district soviets existed before a central Moscow soviet and this body when it came into being was indirectly elected - its members were delegates from the local bodies. Bolshevik influence was considerable in Moscow and had been thrown against keeping the October strike committee in existence. Thus it was November 22nd before the Moscow Soviet first met. It held only four full meetings before the insurrection. At its last meeting it had only 120 delegates from ninety-one factories. The Soviet as a city-wide body was thus weaker than the Petersburg Soviet and did not have its record of fighting for control of the city with the authorities.

On the other hand the Bolshevik organisation was particularly strong in Moscow. It had a party militia of some thousand members and a 'technical group' charged with preparing the insurrection. The garrison was considerably more disaffected than in Petersburg. Unfortunately the key mutiny in the garrison broke out just before the Bolsheviks and the Soviet were ready. The Rostovsky Guards mutinied on December 2nd and elected a 20-man soldiers' committee. But their mutiny was suppressed on the 4th. The appeal for a general strike from Petersburg came on December 6th. The Soviet immediately launched the strike and the insurrection followed. The main coordinating body consisting of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks was arrested on the 8th. Thereafter the rising lost coordination and the fighting became fragmented and of a guerilla type. Deprived of party leadership the Soviet handed over conduct of the rising to the district soviets. Even then the fighting went on until December 18th, only being finally crushed when the Semyonovsky Guards arrived by rail from Petersburg.



A Barricade in Moscow.

Production

Trotsky extended the analysis Luxemburg had made. Luxemburg saw the potential of the mass strike to break the stultifying trade union and electoral routinism of the West European labour movement. She saw it as a tactic that could put the masses on the road to the socialist revolution. Trotsky made this general perspective concrete in a fully developed

revolutionary situation. He saw that the mobilisation of the masses for direct economic and political action necessitated a particular form of organisation and the soviet, the council of workers representatives was just this. In his work '1905' Trotsky stressed:

"The principal method of struggle used by the Soviet was the political general strike. The revolutionary strength of such strikes consists in the fact that acting over the head of capital, they disorganise state power. The greater, the more complete the 'anarchy' caused by the strike, the nearer the strike is to victory. But on one condition only: the anarchy must not be created by anarchic means. The class which, by simultaneous cessation of work, paralyses the production apparatus and with it the apparatus of power, isolating parts of the country from one another and sowing general confusion must itself be sufficiently organised not to become the first victim of the anarchy it has created. The more completely a strike renders the state organisation obsolete, the more the organisation of the strike is obliged to assume state functions. These conditions for a general strike as a proletarian method of struggle were, at the same time, the conditions for the immense significance of the Soviet of Workers Deputies".

The significance of the Soviet, as Trotsky pointed out, is that it is

"the organised power of the mass itself over its separate parts. It constitutes authentic democracy, without an upper and lower chamber, without a professional bureaucracy, but with the voters' right to recall their deputies at any moment".

This element of direct democracy was a facet that Lenin was not to fully recognise until the summer of 1917 when in 'State and Revolution' he understood that the proletariat's organs of struggle must become the basis of the workers' state, the dictatorship of the proletariat. Trotsky understood clearly what the Mensheviks did not that the existing state with its military bureaucratic apparatus had to be overthrown.

The general strike could mobilise the masses for the decisive contest, the seizure of power, but it was not, as the anarchists and the syndicalists thought, in itself the seizure of power:

"The power still has to be snatched from the hands of the old rulers and handed over to the revolution. That is the fundamental task. A general strike only creates the necessary conditions; it is quite inadequate to the task itself". ('1905')

In 1905 in Petersburg and Moscow the political general strike "completed its mission by putting the opponents face to face"; it "brings the army of the revolution to its feet". If - to use Trotsky's phrase - "the Soviet was a workers' government in embryo" its birth trauma as a real government had to be the seizure of power.

In 1905, however, Trotsky still underestimated the role the party had to play as organised political leadership with organised roots in the masses. Firstly to point the way from the 'spontaneous' economic mass strike with its varying immediate demands to the political general strike which sets itself clear definite goals. Secondly, to the transformation of this at the decisive moment into the insurrectionary strike. Thirdly to provide the technical planning and backbone of the insurrection itself. The role of the party in the soviets was neither to stick a party label on them, to dissolve them into the party, nor to abandon leadership to them. It was to win a majority for its slogans, its tactics and its strategy for power.

General Strike 1926

BOSSSES' SHOWDOWN

TUC'S BACKDOWN

The British General Strike of 1926 adds invaluable lessons for socialists to the historical experience of the working class. Trotsky pointed out that the Union bureaucracy was able to defeat the strike so easily, on behalf of the capitalists, because of the weakness of the independent organisations of the rank and file, and of the revolutionary minority within the rank and file. He pointed out that the bureaucracy, knowing full well that a battle was inevitable, led the general strike precisely in order to put them in a position from which they could strangle it when they saw fit - nine days later.

To counter the bureaucracy it is crucial that revolutionaries pose answers that can win workers from their false leaders. We must develop a 'Minority Movement' of the rank and file but direct it onto a revolutionary path, fighting against the various 'left-wing' bureaucrats and stalinists who will claim the right to lead such a movement. We must build rank and file bodies that can lead and organise a general strike that can unseat the class collaborationist officials who hold the reins of power in the unions. This means building action councils, defence squads, price and supply committees - all the forms of organisation that can bring workers into action, into the best possible position to challenge the bureaucrats, the bosses and the government in the struggle for power.

We must today draw the lessons for the rank and file movement of Trotsky's method applied in the British context to outlining what should be the aims of the Minority Movement:- "We affirmed that it is only under the influence of the independent slogans of the Party and of its open criticism that the Minority Movement could take form, appreciate its tasks precisely, change its leaders, fortify itself in the trade unions while consolidating the position of communism."

Building a revolutionary communist party and a rank and file movement are vital tasks for revolutionaries in this present period of sharpening attacks by capitalism and imperialism and of intensifying class struggle.

The period after the First World War was one of growing crisis for British capitalism. Her waning supremacy in world markets in the face of international competition - from America, Japan and most importantly Germany - had already led to that first full-scale Imperialist war. Despite the harsh terms imposed on Germany by the victorious imperialist powers, Britain's ageing industries remained chronically uncompetitive on a world scale. The ruling class's room for manoeuvre had been dramatically curtailed by the impact of the Russian Revolution on the working class of Britain and Europe. In 1920 the threat of a general strike called by a national trade union council of action foiled the Government's plans to intervene against the Soviet Republic by backing a Polish invasion of Russia.

However, despite the strengths of the British trade union movement - its growing membership, two and a quarter million in 1913 to four and a half in 1918, a powerful process of amalgamation which in

1920-21 led to the creation of the AEU, the T&GWU, the GMWU - it also had chronic weaknesses. The bosses' first attempts to deal with the crisis by driving down workers' living standards was taken barely nine months after the working class victory over the Polish arms issue. Demands for drastic wage reductions in the mines marked the opening of the employers' offensive and threw down the gauntlet to the most powerful sections of the working class - the Triple Alliance of the Railwaymen, Miners and Transport workers. Despite the strength of the working class and its obvious willingness to take on the employers in this battle the principal trade union leaders, Frank Hodges of the miners, J.H. Thomas of the Railwaymen and Robert Williams and Ernest Bevin of the Transport workers, betrayed the miners and the whole working class. Using the excuse that the miners' executive refused a "reasonable compromise" they called off the solidarity action leaving the miners to go down to defeat. "Black Friday" as it was known henceforth in the Trade Union movement demonstrated the importance of fighting for a new leadership in the trade unions, a task that the young Communist Party was soon to set itself.

As a direct result of Black Friday the employers had reduced real wages dramatically by 1924 - the miners' by 26%, by 20% for iron and steel workers, by 11% for textile workers. Furthermore, in the wake of this retreat, two million workers left the trade unions between 1921 and 1923. Yet 1923 saw the beginnings of a recovery in the working class movement, an upturn in the number of strikes and an increasing political confidence reflected in the growing strength of the Labour Party and the first minority Labour Government in 1923. But the crisis of British capitalism was growing worse not better and it was becoming clear in ruling class circles that more drastic measures were needed to "restore profitability". The "stabilisation" of Germany after the defeat of the German working class in 1923 via the British-American Dawes Plan resulted not only in cuts in the living standards of German workers but in increased competition with British industry. Coal again became the centre of the crisis. Falling on and defeating the miners, as a preliminary to breaking the power of the trade unions generally, became a central task for the ruling class. This was the task that Baldwin's Tory Government set itself when it came into office in December 1924.

DEPARTURE

Facing the Government and the employers' challenge was an apparently 'left' dominated trade union leadership. The departure of five right wingers including J.H. Thomas into the Labour Government had strengthened the hold of the 'lefts' on the General Council of the TUC which had been established in 1920 and charged with "centrally coordinating" the whole movement. A.J. Cook like the present day Arthur Scargill, fond of describing himself as a "humble follower of Lenin", had been elected to the secretaryship of the Miners' Federation in 1924 with the assistance of the CP and Miners' Minority Movement which had been formed in January of that year. Other left wingers on the General Council included A.B. Swales of the engineers, A.A. Purcell, president of the TUC and George Hicks of the Building Trade Workers. Hicks and Purcell took a prominent role in campaigning for a united international trade union federation, one including the Russian trade unions and the Red international of Labour Unions (RILU). As Purcell put it at the Hull congress in 1924, he was fighting for "a genuinely international federation of Trade Unions".

The Communist Party, though small, had a significant and growing industrial implantation with its paper Workers' Weekly averaging a healthy circulation of 50,000. The CP was clear at this time that neither the present leadership of the unions nor the old methods of struggle were capable of combatting the employers' offensive; a movement had to be built under communist leadership, which would transform the unions and prepare them for battle. To this end in August 1924 the first conference of the National Minority Movement was held. "The Worker" (paper of the British RILU) spelled out the tasks of such a movement:

- "In every union the Rank and File forces must be gathered
- (1) around a fighting programme
- (2) around concrete demands for union consolidation and reorganisation
- (3) around the necessity for creating a new ideology amongst the trade union membership

- (4) around the necessity of training and developing a new leadership to replace the old."

Their first conference had over 270 delegates representing some 270,000 workers and, by the eve of the General Strike the special conference of the Minority Movement brought together delegates from 547 organisations representing 957,000 trade unionists.

The weakest link of the British economy, the coal industry, was to provide the starting point for the ruling class offensive. On June 30th 1925, faced with the German coal mines in the Ruhr going back into full production, the coal owners gave notice of the termination of existing agreements involving drastic wage reductions and abolition of the principle of a minimum wage. Baldwin stated the position bluntly to a deputation of miners the day before the employers' notices expired:

"All the workers of this country have got to take reductions in wages to help put industry on its feet".

However, the plans of the employers and Government were temporarily halted by the General Council declaring its support for the miners and instructing all trade unionists involved in the transport of coal - railwaymen, dockers, transport workers, to cease work. Not ready for a massive industrial strike wave, the Government retreated.

An emergency cabinet meeting came up with a 9 month wage subsidy while the favourite ruling class delaying tactic, a "Royal Commission" under Sir Herbert Samuel made recommendations on the mining industry.

While "Red Friday", the day the Government backed down in face of united industrial action, became a symbol for the working class of their industrial strength, for the ruling class it meant something different. Winston Churchill, then Chancellor of the Exchequer and one of the most militant advocates of breaking the power of the unions, summed up the reasons for postponing confrontation in a speech a few months later. "We therefore decided to postpone the crisis in the hope of averting it, or, if not of averting it, of coping effectively with it when the time comes".

This was no idle threat. Between "Red Friday" and Churchill's speech the Government had perfected its administrative machinery - the country was divided in ten divisions, each under a Minister as special commissioner in charge of a staff of civil servants to handle direction of transport, food, postal services, coal etc. Just as the Thatcher Government has recently refined and perfected its anti-union police squads so Churchill and Baldwin made sure that the trade union movement would face the full might of the state forces when they prepared to defend themselves. The official machinery was linked into the "volunteer service committees". The "Organisation for Maintenance of Supplies" (OMS), a semi-official body for organising scab "volunteers", was set up in September. It undertook the training of strike breakers who learned their skills on the private works railways and lorries lent by industrialists at weekends. The commissioners organised special divisional conferences which planned the measures to be taken in the event of a general strike - dealing with the "safe conduct" of transport, setting up mobile police squads, and organising the special

constabulary and the armed thugs of the "Civil Constabulary Reserve" (recruited from ex-soldiers "who could be vouched for") for their strike breaking activities.

While the ruling class was preparing itself for the coming confrontation - the trade union leaders and the TUC leaders carried on business as usual. The General Council, despite its 'left' majority took no steps to organise the working class for battle.

CRITICISM

The Communist Party, hog tied by the alliance between the British TUC General Council and the Russian Trade Unions, in the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee, mounted only muted criticism of the inactivity of the Trade Union leaders.

The perspective of fighting for a general staff of an ideologically and organisationally transformed trade union movement, which could take on and defeat the class enemy, developed at the first Minority Movement conference, had by 1926 become a passive disarming slogan - "All power to the General Council". That this demand posed no threat to the authority of the Trade Union leaders was made quite clear by Walter Citrine in his memoirs:

"People who thought like myself had for years been talking about a general staff of labour. 'All power to the General Council' they declared. Such slogans seemed not only eminently desirable but just plain common sense. We didn't realise how conservative a force the trade union movement could be in relation to its own affairs".

By March 1926 when the Samuel Commission reported, the Government and employers were confident enough to go straight onto the offensive. The miners were not the only target, the engineering employers were demanding longer hours, the railway companies were threatening wage cuts and the building employers were beginning an assault on working conditions. The Commission report itself, starting from the basis that the coal industry was "uneconomic" and losing money, proposed an ending of the subsidy and wage cuts and coupled this with recommending a degree of state intervention to rationalise the outmoded industry.

While the miners' leaders rejected the Commission's report, they found the General Council increasingly evasive in declaring its support. J.H. Thomas, now back on the General Council and a leading member of its industrial committee, reflected the fears of the right wing trade union leaders only a fortnight before the General Strike, when he declared "to talk at this stage as if in a few days all the workers of the country were to be called out was ... letting loose passions that might be difficult to control." Thomas and Bevin were terrified by the thought of a general strike against the Government. As good reformists the possibility of a strike which challenged the 'constitution' or even worse, one which got out of their control and raised the question of who ruled, the workers or the bosses, had to be prevented at all costs.

Neither did the 'lefts' on the General Council have any alternative to offer. They could VERBALLY acknowledge the need to overthrow capitalism, but as soon as they found themselves in a situation where they had to LEAD such a battle, to organise and fight

for it, they retreated. This is why Swales, Hicks and Purcell could be prominent leftist leaders of the TUC before the General Strike but then concede the leadership to the likes of Thomas and Bevin during the crucial period of struggle.

The TUC industrial committee's frantic search for a compromise which would prevent a general strike went on right up to the very eve of the general strike. While the biggest May day demonstration seen since the revolutionary years after the war was gathering in Hyde Park, Thomas and Co. were closeted with the Government in Downing Street trying to achieve agreements on the basis of the Samuel report. As Thomas himself was to candidly put it, "I suppose my usual critics will say I was grovelling and it is true. In all my long experience I have never begged and pleaded like I begged and pleaded all day today".



Left: Earl of Birkenhead.
Below: The TUC General Council;
J H Thomas, A Swales, B Turner,
A Pugh (Chairman) and W. Citrine
(Acting General Secretary)



The trade union leaders' grovelling failed to impress Baldwin and the emboldened Government broke off talks and threw down the gauntlet. The excuse was the refusal of NATSOPA chapel to print a Daily Mail leader article attacking the general strike as subversive. The Mail was then as it is today, in the forefront of a yellow press campaign against the unions. Its presses churned out a daily diet of slander and insults directed at workers and their allies. Despite the General Council's cringing repudiation of the printers' actions, the Government refused further negotiations.

With the miners already locked out and a conference of trade union executives already convened the General Council was FORCED to go ahead and call out its troops on Monday May 3rd. The Government gave no alternative to the craven trade union leaders but to take the action they desperately tried to avoid.

The response was overwhelming. The strike was solid. Even now the General Council did not call out all the trade unions - the engineers and shipyard

workers were kept "in reserve". The ruling class, of course, had no such qualms about using the full force at its disposal. The Army was deployed in force, with two battallions of guards complete with cavalry and armoured cars being sent to occupy the London docks the day after the strike began. Warships were anchored in the Mersey, Humber, Tyne and Clyde, and special constables and civil constabulary reserve were mobilised to protect the strike-breaking volunteers of the OMS. The British Gazette, the Government's propaganda sheet run by Churchill, was clear that what was involved was a political challenge to the Government which needed to be crushed. But if the Government and employers were clear as to what was at stake and prepared to fight to the finish the TUC leaders desperately searched for ways of avoiding an all out fight with them.

With the strike solid and Councils of Action springing up throughout the country the General Council became ever more frantic to end the strike. Charles Dukes summarised the nightmare of the trade union leaders faced with a growing General Strike:

"Every day that the strike proceeded, the control and the authority was passing out of the hands of responsible executives into the hands of men who had no authority, no control."

"Negotiations" proceeded throughout the strike if not with the Government then through intermediaries like Lord Winbourne, liberal land-owner and industrialist with whom Thomas was in the habit of dining. Herbert Samuel's offer to be intermediary was seized upon by the TUC's "negotiating" committee. The first meeting took place on Friday when the committee offered to accept wage cuts for the miners in return for implementation of the rest of the Samuel Report. The Government was unimpressed, feeling sure it had the trade union leadership on the run. Cabinet members, Churchill and Birkenhead declared that "mere acceptance (of wage cuts) was not now enough", it was a question of a "fight to the finish".

By Tuesday the "Samuel Memorandum" was agreed to by the TUC which involved wage cuts for the miners and calling off the General Strike. Last minute efforts were made to persuade the miners' leaders to agree - without success. On Wednesday 12th May the negotiating committee led by Pugh, Thomas and Bevin delivered their surrender to Baldwin's assembled Cabinet. Baldwin refused point blank to give any assurances on reinstatements or victimisations nor on acceptance of the Samuel memorandum. Birkenhead was later to write to a fellow MP that "their surrender was so humiliating that some instinctive breeding made one unwilling even to look at them".

The 'lefts' were silent. Even the miners' leaders while continuing to reject wage cuts, merely registered that calling off the strike was the "sole responsibility of the General Council" and thanked the "wonderful display of loyalty displayed of all workers". No attempt was made by Cook and Herbert Smith, the miners' leaders, to rally the rank and file trade unionists against the betrayal of their leaders.

The CP and Minority Movement had put themselves in a similar situation. Having failed to prepare their members and supporters for a potential sell out by 'lefts' as well as rights they were as bewildered and disarmed as the rest of the working class and

unable to mobilise any resistance. The CP's paper 'Workers Weekly' had declared in the last issue before the strike "Our party does not hold leading positions in the trade unions. It is not conducting the negotiations with the employers and the Government. It can only place its forces at the service of the workers - led by others". This passive, fatalistic approach flowed directly from the disastrous policy of muting its criticism of the left reformist leaders on the General Council and thus failing to prepare an alternative leadership via the Minority Movement, that could take control of the strike out of the hands of the TUC leaders the minute they inevitably moved to betray the General Strike.

The General Council's decision to end the General Strike was met with disbelief and incredulity by the workers on strike. All the evidence suggests the strike was growing stronger day by day as the Councils of Action organised. The employers responded to the surrender with waves of victimisations of militants and attacks on previous hard won conditions. A defeat was only prevented from turning into an immediate rout by the magnificent response of rank and file trade unionists. The day after the strike was "called off" a 100,000 MORE workers were on strike against the employers' victimisation campaign. The ruling class's euphoria evaporated as it appeared that the worst had happened - a general strike out of control of the trade union leaders. The 'Daily Mail' turned from howling 'Dissolve the TUC' and 'Revolution Routed' to calling for 'No Reprisals' the following day. Baldwin entreated the bosses "let us get the workers calm as soon as we can".

Of course after the workers were back at work the onslaught started in earnest once again. General Strikes were made illegal and the right to picket restricted. Thousands of militants were victimised and workers left the unions in droves. TUC membership by 1927 had fallen below 5 million for the first time since 1916. The miners fought on alone for 7 months until, driven by starvation, they were forced to accept the employers' terms.

The General Strike of 1926 was defeated not because the forces of the state were stronger than those of the working class, nor because of a lack of resolve on the part of rank and file trade unionists. It was beaten because its leaders had no wish to see the strike through to its conclusion. The trade union leaders, 'lefts' as well as rights, were frightened of a revolutionary situation developing and preferred defeat to revolution.

Councils of Action Workers' Defence

The initial official impetus for the establishment of Councils of Action in 1926 came from the "Proposals for Co-ordinated Action" adopted by the TUC General Council on May 1st and which declared: "The work of the Trades Councils, in conjunction with the local officers of the trade unions actually participating in the strike shall be to

assist in carrying out the foregoing provisions (i.e. stoppage of work in various trades and undertaking of exceptions thereto) and they shall be charged with the responsibility of organising the trade unionists in dispute in the most effective manner, for the preservation of peace and order."

However, effective Councils of Action went far beyond this formal co-ordinating role envisaged by the TUC and far beyond the normal functioning of Trades Councils. On the initiative of militants, moribund Trades Councils were revived. Existing ones broadened to bring in all types of working class organisations until they became real expressions of the whole working class movement and therefore potential organs of workers' power.

The essential components of the most effective strike committees and Councils of Action were the Commissariats (distributing food often in conjunction with local co-operative societies), the workers' defence corps and propaganda bodies producing local bulletins. Where the right-wing dominated the strike organisations, committees remained formal, often split and unco-ordinated and ineffective.

Police picket busters yesterday and today.



As the strike developed, the various strike committees and Councils of Action necessarily broadened their activities. The nature of the situation demanded daily meetings; in a number of the more effective Councils there was always at least a sub-committee in permanent session day and night. Special Committees or departments were set up such as Finance, Propaganda and Publicity (including Information, Press, Intelligence), Relief and Prisoners Aid, Pickets, Permits, Transport, Entertainment etc.

Where picketing was most effective it took the form of mass pickets of a united character organised by the Councils of Action. Successful mass pickets were most common in militant industrial areas, particularly in the coalfields and on the railways. London was the scene of some of the most effective picketing. In West Ham and Poplar the streets were blocked except for transport "By permission of the TUC". The centralised picket at Bolton organised 2,280 pickets in two days on a duty roster of 4 hours on and 20 hours off.

On the Councils of Action and the strike committees fell the main responsibility for information - meetings, bulletins, etc. - to counteract the Government-monopolised BBC, the British Gazette edited by Winston Churchill, and many other reactionary news-sheets. The TUC's 'British Worker' reached a circulation of over a million by the end of the strike, but added little to the organisation and fighting capacity of the strikers. The gaps were filled by hundreds of local Bulletins edited by the Councils of Action. About half of the 140 Councils of Action and strike committees who answered a Labour Research Department enquiry after the strike had produced local or area bulletins. Most of the bulletins appeared daily, in some cases with a circulation of up to 10,000.

In the face of police attacks and scabbing by the OMS, workers' defence corps played a vital role in defending the strike and the activities of the workers' organisations. One such defence corps was formed in the Fife Coalfield. Here the Trades Council formed a Council of Action which, in its turn, formed a Workers Defence Corps along with sections on Food and Transport, Information and Propaganda, later adding others on Prisoners Aid and Entertainment. Reporting just after the strike a member of this Council of Action wrote:

"The organisation worked like clockwork. Everything was stopped - even the railway lines were picketed. The Council had a courier service second to none in Britain with 3 motor cars, 100 motor cycles, and as many push bikes as was necessary. They covered the whole of Fife taking out information and bringing in reports, sending out speakers everywhere, as far north as Perth."

The report continues, on defence corps:

"After police charges on mass pickets, the Defence Corps, which 150 workers had joined at the outset, was reorganised. As numbers rose to 700, of whom 400, commanded by workers who had been NCOs in the war, marched in military formation through the town to protect the picket. The police did not interfere again." (Reported in Workers Weekly No. 173 11.6.1926)

A daily bulletin was issued by the Council of Action, which took over the Cooperative Hall as its headquarters. It is not surprising that in this, one of the most militant and best organised areas of the strike, arrests were frequent along with arbitrary prison sentences and few acquittals. In parts of the Fife Coalfield control of transport passed into the hands of the strikers. Abe Moffat, a prominent CP miner described this in the following way:

"Cowdenbeath, Fife ... all motor vehicles had to get permission from the Trades Council before travelling up the Great North Road... to ensure that no one would pass, miners had a rope across the road. If a motor vehicle had a pass it got through; if it had no pass it had to turn back".

The Middlesbrough Central Strike Committee was an extremely effective committee. "It may be safely said that we have never known a strike entered upon with such enthusiasm and determination by the workers before" its secretary reported afterwards. It met daily, kept an emergency committee on duty at night and organised an efficient despatch riders service.

CP executive committee member Murphy reported that it was so authoritative that it secured the withdrawal of all mounted police and special constables from the streets "in the interests of order".

In Sheffield the Trades Council formed its industrial section into a Central Dispute Committee, which refused an official order of cooperation from the CP, but also sought the support of its individual members. In response the CP and the Minority Movement organised, in Sheffield, an unofficial strike committee, which produced a daily bulletin of around 10,000 copies. After 4 days the duplicating equipment was seized by the police, but the No. 6 'Special Strike Bulletin' appeared on May 11th, prepared secretly from somewhere in the A.E.U. Institute in Stanley Street.

The organisation, enthusiasm, and initiative of the health Councils of Action stood out starkly against the inertia and cowardice of the TUC. In fighting for a general strike in the present period, we must build such organisations, based on the rank and file, that can not only run an effective strike, but can also lay the basis of a challenge for power.

TROTSKY WARNS OF 'LEFTS' IN VAIN

The policy of the British CP in the period leading up to the General Strike was determined by its small size and influence in a working class dominated by the reformist Labour Party and trade union leaders. The tactic of the united front, elaborated at the 3rd and 4th Congresses of the Communist International, saw its application in Britain through the CP's efforts to build a National Minority Movement.

The starting point for the united front was the recognition by large numbers of workers, that in the face of a growing capitalist offensive there was a need for united action to defeat it. Trotsky pointed out that "the struggle for a united front is of such great significance in England because it responds to the elementary demands of the working class for a new orientation and grouping of forces." (Problems of the British Labour Movement.)

This situation allowed the CP to unite in action with reformist workers and their leaders in action to defend the immediate interests even if such joint action was on the basis of limited goals. The object was to win the trust of the masses in the course of practical struggle and at one and the same time demonstrate to reformist workers the treacherous role that their leaders would play even in limited struggles. This tactic was permissible on one condition - that the CP retained its absolute political independence from the reformist parties. As Trotsky put it:

"The ideological and organisational formation of a really revolutionary (i.e. Communist) party on the basis of a mass movement is only conceivable under conditions of a continuous, systematic, unwavering, untiring and naked denunciation of the muddles, the compromises and indecision of the quasi left leaders of all shades." (From the same article).

In other words joint action was not an excuse for keeping quiet about the likely vacillating of the reformist leaders. Indeed, the united front was intended to open up the best possible conditions for gaining a hearing for such criticisms amongst the masses.

The danger in Britain in the mid-twenties was that in its eagerness to increase its influence over the masses, the young CP, under the pressure of the lefts and their supporters in the trade unions, would succumb to an opportunist use of the united front tactic - that it would curtail its criticisms of the lefts in order to gain "a better hearing" in the working class.

While this tendency to bend to national forces of the class struggle could have been corrected by a revolutionary communist international, the centrist Stalin faction had already usurped control of the Russian Communist Party and therefore of the Communist International.

In 1926 it was Stalin who guided the policies of the British CP and he guided them in the direction of the united front applied in an OPPORTUNIST fashion. Trotsky raised warnings against the dangers of such a policy. Neither the CI nor the British CP, however, heeded his words. In fact, his comradely criticisms and advice were met with repression by the Stalin faction - and Trotsky was slandered as an enemy of the working class. The result of Stalin's policies for Britain was that the General Strike in support of the miners was defeated, the working class remained disoriented for decades and the young CP missed the greatest opportunity it was ever to have for capturing leadership over wide layers of the British working class.

Trotsky vigorously encouraged the young CP to prepare itself to seize the opportunities that were opening up in the prelude to the General Strike. This meant developing, at every stage, the independence of the masses from the trade union bureaucrats - so well entrenched in the birthplace of trade unionism - and consolidating the CP as an independent force. This line was summed up in his attitude to the rank and file movement, the Minority Movement, that the CP had built. On the one hand the CP had to tirelessly build it, but on the other they had to be seen as separate from it:

"While giving all round support to the movement of the truly revolutionary minority and particularly while giving support to acceptable candidacies of the representatives of this minority for this or that position in the trade union movement (always on the basis of a specific practical programme), the British Communist Party must not in any circumstances or under any conditions identify itself with the Minority Movement or merge the organisations. The British Communist Party must maintain full freedom of criticism with respect to the Minority Movement as a whole as well as with respect to its individual leaders, their mistakes and vacillations." (Writings on Britain, New Park Edn. vol 2 pp200-1.)

ESSENCE

In Trotsky's view this was the essence of the united front tactic with regard to the trade unions in Britain. Applying the tactic on this basis was vital in a situation where the masses had enormous illusions in the left reformist leaders on the General Council of the TUC, such as Hicks, Purcell and Co. To give these 'lefts' any room to manoeuvre, any credentials as potentially 'revolutionary' or to uncritically identify with them would be suicidal for the CP. This was why Trotsky was particularly critical of these characters. The illusions of the most militant sections of the working class in them made them even more dangerous than the 'moderates' on the General Council. Before the strike Trotsky pointed out the real mettle of the 'left' gentlemen:

"It should be thoroughly understood that leftism of this kind remains left only so long as it has no practical obligations. But as soon as the question of action arises the left wingers respectfully cede the leadership to the rights".

Despite Trotsky's warnings, despite his insistence that the CP should remain a clearly independent revolutionary force, an opposite line was adopted, and this, in part, paved the way for the rapid defeat of the General Strike. It was not that the strike lacked determination that it failed, but because the right wingers on the TUC shamefully engineered a betrayal, the 'lefts' allowed them to do this without so much as a whimper, and the CP, having based its strategy for victory on relying on the 'lefts' to lead the strike, were thrown into confusion when they did not do this. What lay behind this debacle?

LASTING BLOC

To answer this we have to look beyond Britain and beyond the central committee of the CPGP. The British General Strike took place at a time when, not only the revolutionary wave in Europe was on the ebb, but also when reaction, in the shape of the bureaucratic Stalin faction was marching forward in the Soviet Union itself. Part of this forward march was the policy of "socialism in one country". Stalin wanted to give up on the international revolution, something that Lenin and Trotsky had argued was not an option but a vital necessity for the safeguarding of the Soviet State as well as for the real liberation of the world working class. Stalin replaced this with the reactionary nationalist utopian goal of socialism within the borders of one country, Russia alone. To achieve this, Stalin had to pursue a foreign policy that sacrificed the interests of the revolution to the aim of keeping imperialism happy,

thereby preventing it from invading the Soviet Union. To do this Stalin reduced the Communist International to the pliable instrument of his foreign policy aimed at appeasing imperialism. National CPs were forced to pursue policies that would serve the Soviet Bureaucracy even if that meant, as it invariably did, abandoning a revolutionary perspective.

In Britain this policy manifested itself in the way in which the Anglo-Russian Committee (ARC) was developed by the Stalin Faction. Formed in 1924, Trotsky viewed this temporary bloc between the Russian Trade Unions and the British General Council as a legitimate use of the united front tactic. The General Council had taken a step to the left under the pressure of the masses, agreeing to take up the cudgels against the social-democratic 'Amsterdam' TU federation in favour of unity with the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU). The formation of the ARC together with the campaign being waged in the trade unions by the British CP on the question was aimed at pinning the TUC to its commitment. Any retreat or vacillation on the part of the General Council would result in the breaking of the ARC by the Russian Trade Unions thus issuing a clear warning to the British working class of their leaders' retreat.



TROTSKY

But the Stalin faction did not see the ARC in this fashion. They saw it as a lasting bloc with the leadership of the British trade unions - one which was predominantly aimed at preventing the British Government from intervening militarily against the Soviet Union. Stalin's 'realism' led him to place his faith in the vacillating bureaucrats as protectors of the Soviet Union in preference to developing a revolutionary strategy for the British Communist Party and working class.

Trotsky clearly pointed out the impact of this policy:

"A young CP whose entire strength lies in criticism and irreconcilability reveals at a decisive moment a surplus of qualities of the opposite order. At bottom it is a false understanding of the united front. Day in, day out the British CP was taught that union with Purcell and Hicks would aid the defence of the USSR. This could not pass without leaving its traces on the consciousness of the British CP." (Trotsky on Britain.)

The CP therefore built its strategy for defeating the ruling class offensive around the 'left' leaders aided and prodded occasionally by the Minority Movement. "All power to the General Council" became the central slogan as the CP believed that the lefts on this body would, with such power, carry the strike through to a lasting victory. The effect of the policy in practice was somewhat different, as Trotsky had predicted. The strike was defeated and the CP was identified with the perpetrators of the defeat. In the wake of the betrayal Stalin refused to break up the ARC and instruct the CP to pursue an independent line - he steadfastly maintained the alliance. Eventually, having no further use of ARC as a provider of left cover for their treachery, the TUC broke the alliance when they complained that the Soviet Union's financial aid to the striking miners constituted external interference in the affairs of a British trade union!



Trotsky crisply summed up the outcome of the whole affair: "The masses knew as the leaders of the movement only Purcell, Hicks and Cook, whom, moreover Moscow vouched for. These 'left' friends, in the first serious test, shamefully betrayed the proletariat. The revolutionary workers were thrown into confusion, sank into apathy, and naturally extended their disappointment to the CP itself, which had only been the passive part of this whole mechanism of betrayal and perfidy."

The Minority Movement was reduced to zero; the Communist Party returned to the existence of a negligible sect. in this way thanks to the radically false conception of the party the greatest movement of the English proletariat, which led to the general strike, not only did not shake the apparatus of the reactionary bureaucracy but, on the contrary, reinforced it and compromised communism in Britain for a long time". (Trotsky - On the Trade Unions.)

Against this bankrupt policy Trotsky and the Left Opposition inside the Russian Communist Party, argued for a revolutionary internationalist line. Revolutionary, not bureaucratic diplomacy was the key to the proletarian victory and therefore also the best guarantee for the defence of the Soviet Union against imperialism. But Stalin disagreed. For them the united front was merely an opportunist device to serve the bureaucracy's needs. As such he was prepared to unite with leaders against the masses. Trotsky correctly accused him of having: "turned over the Minority Movement bound hand and foot to the gentlemen of the General Council. And in the Minority Movement itself you likewise refused to counterpose and are incapable of

counterposing genuine revolutionists to the oily reformists." (Writings on Britain.)

Against the perfidy of the Moscow reactionaries and against the rotten leaders at Congress House, left and right, Trotsky urged a consistently revolutionary policy for the British working class, independence of its organisations and for a General Strike organised and led by councils of action, defended by workers' defence units, and for a decisive battle with the capitalist state machine. Stalin's victory over the Left Opposition inside the Soviet Union, almost complete by 1926, ensured that these urgings went unheeded, and sometimes unheard, by the British CP.

PUT SINN FEIN TO THE TEST Concluded from page 5

In Class Struggle No. 11 in the run-up to the Prior Assembly elections IWG concluded:- "Therefore, although resources do not permit us to stand candidates, the IWG believes the correct tactical course for revolutionaries is to contest the elections and enter the Assembly as a means to rally the working class to a revolutionary action programme. ... We give no political support to the programmes of the Centrist PD or the Republicans." The IWG criticised the call for votes for Sinn Fein made by the centrists as empty of any concrete call to action. The same criticism applies at the present time to PD's timid fudge of advice to Sinn Fein that passes for revolutionary criticism in the pages of "Socialist Republic" in June '83.

The fight for united front action with the Republicans can only have as its strategic objective to bring the working class to the head of the struggle for Permanent Revolution in Ireland - replacing the Republicans and reformists with a revolutionary Trotskyist leadership and party. All tactics towards the Republicans must flow from this goal. Thus the call for votes for them is an act of solidarity with the aroused masses under their leadership - it can never be posed as any form of POLITICAL support for them - only as critical support for an action taken jointly. Such a call for votes as a tactic in struggle was not issued by the IWG in the context of the Assembly elections. That was an error in a tactic, but one that flowed from the concern to defend the content of the revolutionary communist programme against political adaptation to the illusions of revolutionary nationalism. It was thus an error at which the record of the centrists in no way entitles them to point an accusing finger, inveterate tailists of left nationalism that they are.

What the IWG overlooked in seeing the Assembly Election as simply a battle of political programmes and leaderships was the plebiscitary nature of such Imperialist elections in the concrete conditions of the anti-unionist revolt - a plebiscite to legitimate the existence of the Orange State and the national oppression by imperialism which dismembers and retards the all-Ireland working class. It is that content also of the General Elections that makes the fight for votes for Sinn Fein a concrete action in solidarity with the anti-unionist struggle - on the strict condition that Trotskyists fight to put Sinn Fein sharply to the test before the working class on revolutionary action demands. ●

1936/38: The General Strike in France



Trotsky arrives in Paris 1932

Europe in the 1930s was reeling under the combined impact of economic depression and acute social upheavals. The Fascists had conquered power in Italy and Germany defeating the strongest working class movement in the world. Against this background the working class of France, in 1936, rose up in a massive strike movement - one that had the potential to alter the balance of forces in favour of the working class on a European scale.

But the French workers failed, not because they lacked determination, but because their reformist and Stalinist leaders preferred collaboration with the bourgeoisie to proletarian revolution. Stalin's criminal ultra leftism in Germany, where the social democrats were characterised as 'social fascists' and therefore equally as bad as the Nazis, resulted in tragedy. Unable to correct his error on the basis of Marxist principles, Stalin, pursuing his own short term needs, swung violently to the right. Distorting the working class United Front policy of Lenin and Trotsky he forced the parties of the Comintern to adopt the class collaborationist policy of the Popular Front - alliances with the Social Democrats and bourgeois parties, in which working class needs and demands were to be subordinated to the defence of 'democracy' against fascism - bourgeois democracy that is.

Following the Stalin-Laval pact in May 1935, the French Communist Party (PCF) loyally carried out the new line. The People's Front in France was formed in June 1935, comprising the PCF, the French Socialist Party (SFIO) and "the imperialist bourgeoisie in the shape of the Radical Party and smaller tripe of the same sort" (Trotsky - 'Committees of Action - Not Peoples Front'). In the May election of 1936 the Popular Front (PF) won 376 seats as against the right wing parties' 222. But this parliamentary victory for 'progress' was accompanied by a major betrayal of the working class's most fundamental interests.

With the victory of the PF the French workers, regarding it as 'their' government, went on strike and occupied their factories in pursuance of their demands. The strike rapidly developed bringing France to a standstill within days. The PCF were a major force within the unions. After the formation of the PF the two main union federations, the PCF-dominated CGTU and the reformist CGT, had fused. The influx of young militants which this stimulated greatly strengthened the CP's influence in key manufacturing unions. The young workers, uncontaminated as yet by the despair and demoralisation that years of treacherous leadership inevitably leaves in its wake, provided the backbone of the strikes and could have

been turned into a force that would have been able to challenge and drive out the bureaucratic traitors. The CP, however, worked overtime to ensure that this potential was never realised.

The revolutionary opportunities that were opened up by the French strikes of May/June 1936 were enormous. The Stalinists of the PCF had no interest in seizing them. Their position of influence in the PF government, however, gave them a very real interest in containing the revolutionary developments. It was left to the Trotskyists, in the Bolshevik-Leninist group in France to argue and propagandise for a revolutionary strategy for the French working class. Their resources were small and their impact limited - but their contribution was far from negligible. As Trotsky said:

"On fertile soil, a handful of seeds gives a big yield. Thus, under conditions of social crisis and of the indignation of the masses, a small organisation, poor in material resources but armed with correct slogans, has exercised an undoubted influence on the course of revolutionary events..." ('The New Revolutionary Upsurge and the Tasks of the Fourth International').

The lessons of their intervention in and of Trotsky's appraisal of the French strikes of 1936 are invaluable guides for revolutionaries today.

The '36 strike wave

The economic depression in France had dire effects on unemployment and wages. For example wages for miners in the south of France had fallen from 30 Francs in 1929 to 28 Francs in 1936 for double the amount produced. Inflation hit the petty bourgeoisie hard as well, eroding pensions and income from fixed-price rents. In this context the time was ripe for the fascists to increase their influence, especially among the unemployed and petty-bourgeoisie.

On February 6th the fascists attempted to storm the French Parliament. This prompted the frightened resignation of the president Daladier, and the appointment of the right-winger Gaston Doumergue in his stead on February 7th. It was vital to stop the growing power of the fascists. Trotsky and his supporters called for workers militia squads to crush the fascists before it was too late. Workers were ready and willing to confront the fascists with force and, heeding the mood of the militants, the French SFIO called a general strike on February 12th.

By this time Moscow had reversed its decision against cooperating with social democrats, and the PCF and the CGTU which was still independent from the CGT decided to give official support to the strike at

the last minute. One and a half million workers mobilised in a magnificent display of unity forged from below while the fascists dared not show their faces on the streets.

This success was followed by the creation of the Popular Front (PF). Its programme argued for anti-fascism and limited social reforms, but explicitly guaranteed capitalist property and institutions. An attempt by the SFIO to make it more left wing was defeated by the combined votes of the Radical Party and the Stalinist PCF. The desire for united action against the ravages of the economic crisis nevertheless encouraged workers to put their faith in the notion of the PF in spite of its programme. For its own largely electoral purposes, the PF found it useful to encourage increased political and economic activity amongst the workers who looked to it. It hoped to transform this activity into votes.

When the PF won a majority in May 1936 Leon Blum, the socialist leader formed a government. The PCF, led by Maurice Thorez refused to take any ministerial positions - not because of opposition to the government, but because they were anxious that their presence might alienate bourgeois support for the government. Initially, their caution was unsuccessful as millions of Francs were pulled out of the country. However, as Blum had confidently predicted, the Francs returned but only after the working class had been defeated in a decisive contest with the capitalists and had had the concessions they initially won snatched away from them - a defeat made possible by the treachery of the PCF.



The first night of the Renault occupation Robert Capra /Magnum

In May 1936 strikes and occupations began. At Le Havre, for instance, a struggle developed in response to the sacking of two workers; at the Bloch air craft factory in the Parisian suburbs of Courbevoie a strike was called demanding improved wages and conditions. Bloch workers sent a huge contingent to the 600,000 strong demonstration on May 24th, commemorating the heroic uprising of the first revolutionary state - the Paris Commune. Engineering factories around Paris were either occupied or on strike, and on May 28th 35,000 Renault car workers came out. On May 29th L'Humanite, the Communist Party organ, reported 100,000 workers on strike.

This wave of strikes and occupations accelerated through the end of May reaching smaller factories by early June. Major centres outside Paris were affected, and significantly, a whole new section of workers who had no previous experience of industrial action were drawn into the struggles. By June 4th the movement had shut down newspaper distribution, restaur-

ants and hotels, locksmiths, jewellers, the clothing trade, gas, building and agriculture as well as heavy industry. Important sections of the petty bourgeoisie took action with the workers. Many strikes were supported by local shopkeepers who donated food, either free or at reduced rates.

It seems that most of the activity did not start off with clear demands or coherently organised strike committees and leadership. In any case, none of the strikes were made official by the CGT before June 4th, when Blum hastily formed his cabinet. It was then that the CGT bureaucracy and the PCF at both national and local level moved to take action to derail this upsurge of workers' action which was proving an embarrassment to the newly elected government.

The union officials were reluctant to let control slip out of their own hands. By June 10th over two million were on strike, by now with official union backing, and also with the participation of many rank and file PCF members. The PCF, while it had never encouraged or instigated the strikes, had to save its face with militants while the leadership manoeuvred its way ineptly alongside the PF. The government was attempting to rush measures which might satisfy workers, as well as moving up squads of armed troops to surround Paris.

Trotsky propagandised for accelerating the tempo of the struggle. Against the dead hand of bureaucratic control, he argued for new forms of direct, rank and file organisations, committees of action, defence squads, bodies that could become the basis for working class power. He wrote on June 9th:

"the first self-mobilisation of the masses has outlined and in part brought forward the first elements of the revolutionary leadership ... The old organisational shell has by no means dropped away. On the contrary, it still retains its hold quite stubbornly. But under it the new skin is already visible".

Now was certainly not the time to call a truce. The chance for workers to replace their old leadership with new fighting organs, forged in the experience of the struggle, was of the utmost importance. But the PCF urged workers to return to "order" and "calm" and to accept the concessions their government had negotiated with the bosses. Maurice Thorez, head of the PCF, made a speech declaring: "One must know how to end a strike". Indeed Thorez knew better how to end it than to begin it!

On the same day, June 12th, the government closed the offices of the Bolshevik Leninist paper Lutte Ouvriere, seizing copies of the issue containing the article by Trotsky quoted above, entitled "The French Revolution has begun". The front page headline was bold and uncompromising: "In the factories and in the streets, Power to the workers".

In fact most of the strikes and occupations folded when workers accepted the Matignon agreements, ratified on 10th-11th June. These gave workers a 40-hour 5-day week, paid holidays, 7% wage increases for higher paid workers, 15% for the lower paid. In addition collective representation by unions was recognised.

Although sporadic strikes still continued to break out even after many of the major industries had

returned to normal working, the high point of militant action had passed, without workers having been able to oust the CGT and PCF leaders from their ranks, or challenge the bosses for power. Thus when communist unionists recommended compromise and a return to work, many workers had no arguments to counter these proposals. The metal workers' union in Paris, for example, rejected the advice of its PCF leaders to return to work on 9th and 11th June, but their own demands were so confused that eventually they decided the only solution was to call for the re-opening of their plants under government control.

MATIGNON AGREEMENTS

The Matignon agreements, hailed as a victory by the CGT and PCF leaderships, were undoubtedly forced from the bosses by the efforts of the workers themselves. However in many cases bosses refused to implement them at all, and those bosses who did were soon openly flouting the new conditions, as the militancy of the workers subsided. Also, since the Popular Front left the capitalist finance houses intact, inflation continued to eat into the wage rises as soon as they were negotiated by the unions. The reduction in hours that was won was soon to be used by the bosses, because the agreements were not under workers' control, to carry through speed-ups, introduce new machines, and increase unemployment!

Having betrayed the workers' moves to force the Blum government to meet their demands, the Stalinists switched, AFTER Matignon, to opposing the Popular Front from the left. In September 1936 they supported two large protest strikes against Blum's refusal to help the Republican cause in Spain. This was partly a belated response to rank and file pressure, partly dictated by Comintern foreign policy. August and September saw renewed strike action from large sections of workers. Government employees struck in August and a whole series of textile strikes and occupations broke out in Northern France, sparked off by dismissals of union workers and a fear of lockouts.

Miners, metalworkers, weavers, dockers and shipyard workers soon followed suit. By the autumn, thousands of workers were engaged in a new mass strike wave which sought to stave off the increasingly vicious capitalist counter-offensive of lock-outs, victimisations, mass sackings and rising prices. The Matignon agreement was proved to be a hollow deal. Thousands of workers were disillusioned with the government that they had regarded as theirs. But Blum had won time, having defeated the first and decisive strike wave, he allowed the second one to peter out of its own accord, which, leaderless and directionless it inevitably did - despite the fact that it embraced more workers than the May-June struggles had.

While Thorez and Co. were tailing the militants to suit Stalin's international interests with regard to Spain, the CGT president Jouhaux did not pretend to change his spots. On September 26th 1936, he regretted the impulsiveness of the great mass of newly unionised workers who wanted "immediately full satisfaction for all their demands", and denounced "trouble-making elements inside each factory". He concluded that it was necessary to "develop in the masses a sense of discipline", i.e. let the union leaders prevent workers from developing their own organisations.

Trotsky predicts

Throughout the period of pre-revolutionary turmoil in France, Trotsky mapped out a clear and consistent marxist strategy to guide his French followers, in a series of pamphlets and articles. He took up the key questions of the nature of the Popular Front, the tactics necessary during the strikes, the nature of the general strike and the crucial question of how to transform the strike wave into a final victory over capitalism.

The general strike has long been at the centre of a political tug of war between the anarchists and the revolutionary Marxists in the labour movement. The anarchists are unceasingly loud in their praise of the general strike as the highest expression of the proletariat's ability to go it alone to socialism, without the leadership of a revolutionary party. On the other side Marxists, from Luxemburg on, have argued that while the general strike does represent the spontaneous energy and militancy of the working class it cannot sustain itself on that alone. To win, it requires leadership, organisation, defence squads, and consciously fought-for goals. If it is to challenge for power, the working class cannot rest content with the withdrawal of labour - the conquest of state power requires not a strike but an insurrection.

While the general strike can create the conditions for a rising, it is not the rising itself. Only a revolutionary party can turn the forces mobilised in a general strike to this task. These facts are always overlooked by the anarchists, whose



General Strike continues despite Blum's appeals.

policies have always been guided more by romance than realism. The French general strike of 1936 bears out this marxist understanding of the tactic. Trotsky was clear on the general strike's nature from the very outset. In "Once Again Whither France?" he pointed to the full implications of the general strike slogan:

"The general strike, as every Marxist knows, is one of the most revolutionary methods of struggle. The general strike is not possible except at a time when the class struggle rises above the particular and craft demands, and extends over all occupational and district divisions, and wipes away the lines between the unions and the parties, between legality and illegality, and mobilises the majority of the proletariat in active opposition to the bourgeoisie and the state. ... The entire history of the working class movement proves that every general strike whatever may be the slogans under which it occurs, has an internal tendency to transform itself into an open revolutionary clash, into a direct struggle for power".

The general strike paralyses the economy of the country, but also the power of the state, which

"remains suspended in mid air. It must either subjugate the proletariat by famine and force and constrain it to set the apparatus of the bourgeois state once again in motion, or retreat before the proletariat. Whatever may be the slogans and motive for which the general strike is initiated, if it includes the genuine masses, and if these masses are quite resolved to struggle, the general strike inevitably poses before all the classes in the nation the question: Who will be master of the house?"

How was the proletariat to answer this question that the general strike would inevitably pose to it? Against the menace of the fascist terror gangs Trotsky had argued for the formation of workers' militia. Besides fulfilling an obvious need, such bodies also represented an embryonic form of proletarian power. But what were these militias to be accountable to, whose interests would they serve? Again, Trotsky was unequivocal in his answer. Central to the victory of the strike was the building of committees of action, workplace and community based, embracing all layers of the proletariat. Such bodies could directly serve the workers' interests and could be counterposed to the parliamentary cretinism of the PCF and SFIO. The function of these committees, however, need not be restricted to organising a general strike. They could organise the working class on an entirely new basis, giving workers a first taste of real power, real control over their own lives - they constituted the basis for a new form of power, proletarian power. As such, they could be counterposed GOVERNMENTALLY to the Popular Front parliamentary coalition.

"The soviets have always been born out of strikes. The mass strike is the natural element of the proletarian revolution. The committees of action cannot be at present anything but the committees of those strikers who are seizing the enterprises. From one industry to another, from one factory to the next, from one working class district to another, from city to city, the committees of action must establish a close bond with each other. They must meet in every city, in each productive group in their regions, in order to end with a congress of all the committees of action in France. This will be the new order that must take the place of the reigning anarchy." (The Decisive Stage - 5th June 1936.)

Such a course was not followed by the socialists or "communists" who did not want to upset the Popular Front apple cart. They were desperate to maintain their alliance with the Radical Party, so as to prevent the latter being driven into the arms of reaction. So they appeased the Radicals and accepted the policy of collaboration, imposed, as Trotsky pointed out, by "the Radical bourgeoisie, by the Socialist businessmen and careerists, by the Soviet diplomats and their 'communist' lackeys."

So the Popular Front existed to serve the capitalists. The Blum government had defused the mass strikes of May and June by offering concessions. On the basis of these they forced through a return to work - largely marshalled by the PCF in the factories. But did they move against the capitalists who refused to implement the Matignon agreements? On the contrary, they moved against the workers who later struck to try and win what should have been guaranteed them. For Trotsky the key thing about the Popular Front was precisely this - the workers' parties were prostrate before big capital; workers' interests

were sacrificed on the altar of profit, so that that Radical party could be kept happy and the Blum government preserved. This, despite the fact that the bourgeois order of the 3rd Republic was actually dependent on the workers' parties for its survival - without the rotten leadership of the PCF and SFIO it is quite possible that the May-June events could have cleared the way for the conquest of power by the workers.

While this situation existed there was no possibility of the French working class being able to consolidate their gains - there was a governmental obstacle to them doing it. Trotsky argued for the following tactical orientation to attempt to break the PCF and SFIO militants from their leadership's disastrous policies:

"The Radicals are the line of least resistance for the revolutionary critique. By concentrating your fire against the Radical Ministers, with really concrete examples you will easily get the ear of the Communist and Socialist workers. You may rightly add: 'Unfortunately, the Communist leaders support the radicals against the Socialist leaders'. At any rate our slogan cannot be 'Down with the Blum Government'; but 'Drive the bourgeois Radicals out of the Blum government!' ... It is extremely important for this period but it does not at all mean that we 'protect' the Blum government". (A Hasty Formulation on the People's Front - July 1936.)

But this tactic had to be applied alongside a resolute struggle for the setting up of Soviets. In this respect it can be likened to the Bolshevik policies in 1917 with regard to Kerensky's government - Kick Out the 10 Capitalist Ministers, All power to the Soviets. To argue for this policy in France was not to give support to the PCF or SFIO but to exploit the contradiction that the militants of these parties found themselves in when faced with huge class battles.

Trotsky recognised that the general strike itself, no matter how broad and sweeping, could not resolve the historical choices facing the French proletariat. But as a weapon of class struggle it could be used alongside tactics and demands that would enable the proletariat to either force a break between their parties and the bourgeoisie, or break, to the left, from their parties. The conflicts and turmoil resulting from either development would offer the best possible basis for revolutionaries to build a revolutionary party that could transform a general strike into an all out struggle for power. Only by thus preparing for a new general strike could the consolidation of the concessions granted after the May-June events, and their further advancement, be guaranteed. Trotsky put it thus:

"The precondition for the success of a new general strike is factory committees and soviets" (new stage in the French Revolution.)

Only on the basis of these, the bedrock organisations of proletarian power, could the gains be made lasting. The failure of the working class to resolve this governmental question, the survival of Blum and the truth of Trotsky's predictions, were starkly revealed in the events that followed 1936.

... and, in '38, the chickens come home to roost



Leon Blum

Early in 1937, the Popular Front government came under increasing pressure from international capitalism. Blum was forced to resign, having served his



purpose for the French bosses in June 1938, as his programme of public works designed to boost the economy merely induced the French bosses to take their money out of the country and wait for better times ahead. After Blum stepped down in June, the revamped Popular Front administration "floated" the Franc, and without any government control of exchange inflation was rampant.

In this mounting economic panic the fascist forces, at their peak in 1935-6, took to the streets in large numbers once again. At Clichy on the outskirts of Paris, a fascist demonstration protected by the police was opposed by militant workers. In the ensuing attacks on the counter-demonstrators 5 workers were killed and 300 injured. The Popular Front was increasingly driven to show its true colours to those who had voted it into office. Extreme right-wing terrorist gangs flourished in France, attacking workers. Trotsky's advice on self-defence and armed militias for workers and strikers was never more relevant, for what protection could they expect from THEIR government, which had brutally attacked them at Clichy earlier in the year?



On the economic front the gloss of the Matignon agreement was becoming tarnished. Arbitration inevitably meant a sell-out to the bosses, negotiated by the CGT via the Popular Front. The Goodrich tyre factory workers suffered such a betrayal late in 1937, followed by public service workers and shop workers in the fashionable "Grands Magasins". On their return to work after "arbitration" agreements, militant shop workers were sacked.

Early in 1938 aviation workers went on strike for demands well within the Matignon agreement, but were dragged back to work by the Popular Front with the support of the CGT who claimed their action was in the "national interest". The CGT meantime mounted campaigns against "militants" and "Trotskyists". Suppression of strikes became increasingly vicious and in August 1938 a strike by dockers at the port of Marseilles was smashed by Senegalese troops brought in by this "workers" government.

In 1938 the threat posed to central Europe by Hitlerite Germany was used by the French government as a pretext for further attacks on the gains won by workers in 1936. Blum came and went several times during 1937-8, as the bosses tried various "soft" and "hard" lines of class attack. When Blum no longer headed the government, the PCF and the CGT would encourage militant workers in order to preserve their own power base, since they could now claim that Blum, the workers' friend, had been ousted by reactionary elements who must be opposed. In contrast to the leaders of the Comintern, Trotsky always pointed out that the Popular Front was rotten to the core, whichever puppet was at its head.

The bosses' reaction inside France was as tough as international opposition from outside the country. As the Popular Front demanded the increased flouting of the Matignon agreement in the interests of nationalism, military production etc., the bosses' organisation, the CGPF, refused to make any concessions in arbitration, and set up its own scab unions in factories.

By late 1938 the Popular Front was riven by internal and external pressures. Even the PCF was forced to split and move into opposition, while the Radical party remained true to its reactionary class origins and left the Front to move rightwards. With political and economic crisis looming at home and the fascist menace, which so far had been left to flourish, lurking on France's eastern frontiers, the class-collaboration which had fooled most of the workers for some time was now on the brink of complete disintegration.

In this atmosphere the CGT held its annual conference in the Atlantic port of Nantes in November 1938. While the union delegates spoke of such issues as peace, the political independence of the unions etc., the burning issue should have been the recent decrees of the minister Reynaud. These decrees, which Reynaud had broadcast to the nation on November 12th, should have galvanised even the CGT into action. Their implementation meant that the Matignon agreement was in tatters. Firms could force workers, to do up to 48 hours plus overtime at very cheap rates, e.g. the first 250 hours overtime at 110%, from 250-400 hours at 125%.

The five-day week was abolished, penalties were imposed on workers who refused to perform overtime "ordered in the interests of national defence" incl-

uding dismissal, loss of holiday pay and redundancy money, prohibition from signing on the dole for 6 months etc. If trade unionists propagandised against these measures they could be fined 100 - 1000 francs and 6 days to 3 months in jail. Further repressive measures concerned action against union privileges and the rights of foreign workers.

The franc was revalued, direct taxes increased, price control was abolished on wholesale goods but remained for retail, hitting the working class and petty-bourgeoisie hard while favouring the capitalists; food, transport and postal costs increased. Public works were sacrificed to military spending. Reynaud ended his broadcast with the words: "To the foreigners who are listening in, I say to you that in France the week of two Sundays has ceased to exist". The bosses could ask for nothing better.

But what was the CGT's response to this? CGT president Jouhaux did his utmost to avoid the issue altogether! Eventually Peria, a railway union delegate, presented a motion signed by the communist unions:

"The government's only concern has been to inspire confidence in the capitalists who, for the last two years have exported tens of millions of francs ... the working class is ready to make the effort necessary for economic recovery, but is not prepared to accept socially regressive policies ... the CGT expresses the will of the organised working class to oppose the socially reactionary plan of the (Reynaud) decrees."

There was no call for a general strike, nor mention of HOW the "organised" working class was to organise and what actions, defensive and aggressive, it was to take. Nevertheless, even this was too much and Jouhaux refused to allow the motion to be put.

This lack of leadership was fatal. As soon as the new decrees were announced a wave of strikes and occupations broke out all over France, apparently the spontaneous reaction of a rank and file disgusted at its leadership. Many incidents were provoked by the bosses themselves, who hoped thereby to smash workers' resistance with a short, sharp lesson from company thugs and state police and troops. The leadership in both unions and the PCF refused to legalise these strikes and occupations. In many cases communist union officials did their utmost to defuse the militancy of late November, calling for calm. The metalworkers' union, staunchly communist, condemned "any premature action which might be prejudicial to union discipline" (L'Humanite 25/11/38). In fact most of the left papers did not even publicise the wave of strikes and occupations.



21 Aug. 1939 Stalin-Hitler Pact. Voting for war credits on 2 Sept. did not stop the PCF being banned on 26th.

49

Meantime bitter fighting continued round the steelworks at Denain-Anzin in Northern France, where eventually the communist mayor organised a sell-out. Immigrant workers, mainly Poles and Italians who lived in terror of deportation, were brought in as scabs.

In Paris the Renault plant was occupied and during Chamberlain's visit to Paris on 24-25 November troops and police besieged the buildings. After tear gas canisters had been thrown inside, socialist and PCF leaders arrived to coax the nauseated workers out to imprisonment and trial. The Renault occupation showed the bravery of the workers, most of whom lived locally and were young and unskilled. But rank and file militancy without leadership was not enough.

Only after these spontaneous protests by french workers had been almost destroyed did the CGT decide to call a one-day general strike, on 30th November.

They were even more tardy than the PCF leadership, who had delayed as long as possible, and then either tailed the rank and file or else intervened merely to put a brake on the strike. This token one-day strike, an insult to the recent heroic efforts of the French workers, came when they were exhausted, politically disoriented, and in many cases, physically injured. The strike, said the CGT, was "intended only to protest against the (Reynaud) decrees" and could not "be exploited politically, nor as an insurrectionary manifestation". All meetings, occupations and processions were expressly forbidden!

Even so, the loyalty of the workers under these conditions was amazing. Textiles, building, metal and chemical industries responded well. Even the battered North supported the call. Rural areas, traditionally conservative, made a poor showing, as did white collar workers. The fragile class alliance of workers and petty bourgeois was effectively shattered, but worse was to come.

The disastrous misleadership of the PCF and CGT merely gave the bosses the chance to move in and smash the demoralised workers completely. Militants were identified, arrested, fined and sacked. There were numerous lockouts, and new extremely disadvantageous contracts were forced on the humiliated workforce who had to return on the bosses' terms or starve. Organisations of militant workers were broken. The gains of 1936 were gone and disillusioned workers left the unions in droves. Estimates for late 1938 put union membership only slightly above the 1935 level. The last straw came in August 1939 with the Stalin-Hitler non-aggression pact, when the fate of the PCF was sealed. It had already lost many of its members but in September it was officially banned. This also split the CGT, which reverted to its previous class composition of working class and reformist white-collar sections.

The Vichy government imposed whatever measures it desired on a mute and profoundly disillusioned workforce. Strikes were made illegal, a repressive legal mechanism was set up, inflation and exploitation sucked the life-blood from the workers as they paid the price of supporting an army of occupation. The less fortunate were taken to German factories where even higher rates of exploitation were enforced. Such was the sad legacy of the drastically mistaken trust the French workers placed in the Popular Front government of class-collaboration of the reformist Socialist Party, the stalinist PCF and the bourgeois Radicals.

review

The Origins and Nature of the Stalinist States

Today millions of workers and toilers live under so-called "socialist" or "communist" regimes. Yet in all of these states, whether Cuba, Eastern Europe, China or South East Asia, it is clear that the working class remains politically downtrodden. In only one of these states, the Soviet Union, did the working class consciously seize and hold political power - in 1917 for a period after the Bolshevik Revolution.

The rise of a bureaucratic caste under Stalin within the infant Workers State from the mid 1920s onwards led to the destruction of the democratic centralist leadership of the working class both within Russia and throughout the young Communist International founded by Lenin and Trotsky in March 1919. The brutality of the drive to industrialization which was belatedly inaugurated by Stalin in 1928 and the survival and expansion of Stalinism after the second world war have continued to raise serious questions about the nature of these regimes.

Recently published by Workers Power in Britain and the Irish Workers Group, "The Degenerated Revolution - The Origin and Nature of the Stalinist States" explains the reasons why a series of post-capitalist states have come into being not through the revolutionary action of the working class as in 1917 but through bureaucratic social overturns of capitalism which prevented the working class from exercising a revolutionary role and consciously taking state power.

The book starts out from the analysis made by Trotsky in his seminal work, "The Revolution Betrayed", a major achievement of his 12 years of practical and theoretical struggle to rebuild an international party of the working class and regenerate the Soviet workers state. We stand four square with his view that although the Stalinist bonapartist dictatorship oppresses the working class and parasitically widens the inequalities in the USSR, the fundamental practical gains of the October Revolution - expropriation and nationalisation of capital, the state monopoly of foreign trade and the planned economy - have not been reversed. Bureaucratic irrationality and privilege have however distorted these gains and stymied their potential for expanding the forces of production for human need. Here is not Socialism but a Degenerated Workers State in which a political revolution is needed to smash the bureaucracy and bring the working class to the head of the state and society as a precondition for resuming the transition to socialism and communism.

We therefore, like Trotsky, defend the Soviet Union not because we think that the Stalinist oligarchy is partly progressive or reformable, but because the property relations of that society represent an historic gain for mankind. We defend this against attempts by imperialist capitalism to restore capitalism and subject these states to the status of

semi-colonies.

Trotsky's prognosis for Stalinism - that it would be crushed by working class revolution or else by imperialism - made on the eve of the second imperialist war, proved to be wrong in that period. The reasons, however, were not rooted in a false understanding of the nature of Soviet society or Stalinism as a counter-revolutionary world force; rather its survival and expansion was due to conjunctural factors largely unforeseeable. The Second World War did indeed imperil the first workers state but the internal divisions, partial exhaustion and rivalry of the competing imperialists - Allied and Axis - created unique temporary conditions at the end of the war.

The Soviet Armed forces and Stalinist parties achieved hegemony in the occupied Buffer Zone of E. Europe. In most cases the armed core of the capitalist states was destroyed. But the Stalinist forces did not move to expropriate capital. On the contrary Stalin and his allies sought to stabilise these states as buffer friendly CAPITALIST neighbours. Most of all Stalin sought to demobilise the working class in the zones liberated from fascism. This strategy is shown to be a new extension of Stalin's counter-revolutionary programme (since 1924) of "socialism in one country" (the USSR) and "peaceful co-existence" with capitalist imperialism. As the US Marshall plan was unveiled and made clear the growing threat to Stalinist hegemony over CAPITALIST property forms in E. Europe it became necessary - for the survival of stalinism - to expropriate capital bureaucratically from above while denying to the working class the class political power of democratic workers councils and militias led by their own democratic-centralist mass party. Thus was born a chain of states, identical in form to the Soviet Union but without ever experiencing the democratic power of the working class. These workers states were thus degenerate from birth, ruled from the start by bureaucratic regimes which blocked the transition to socialism.

The book re-examines and rejects the claim that these states are "State Capitalist" - the argument of Tony Cliff and the SWP-SWM and others. Primarily, however, its aim is to get to grips with the precise dialectics and nature of the post-war overturns as a key element of re-elaborating the revolutionary communist programme for the present period as the basis for a new International. The book therefore examines the apparent challenges which the expansion of Stalinism in this way poses to Marxist theory, especially regarding the overthrow of the state.

Nowhere did these problems more acutely pose themselves as an obstacle to the revolutionary communist tradition than in Yugoslavia, where wrong and disastrous conclusions drawn by the post-war Fourth International were a key factor in its

review

degeneration into centrism - its death as a revolutionary leadership by 1951. Again in China and especially in Cuba, the creation of Workers States degenerate from birth left the centrist fragments of the FI floundering, falsifying the realities of what had happened and abandoning vital principles of the revolutionary communist programme. For example it is falsely claimed either that capitalism was not overturned but rather that capitalists emigrated and abandoned their property in those states under pressure of national revolutions - as by the LWR group - or that non-working class leaderships unconsciously carried through a healthy proletarian revolution - as the USFI/Peoples Democracy current believes! These questions are dealt with in detailed analyses of key bureaucratic social overturns - Yugoslavia, China, Cuba, Vietnam and Kampuchea.

Central to a revolutionary perspective for workers power in the anti-imperialist struggles in these countries is the conscious strategy of Permanent Revolution. Again, as the book shows, the creation of degenerate workers states in these anti-imperialist revolutions represents the aborting of Permanent Revolution, not its unconscious verification - as USFI/PD would have us believe. The book thus presents the ONLY consistent application of the revolutionary Marxist tradition to key events of the post-war period. No other analysis offers a coherent basis for the defence of Leninism and Trotskyism in the crucible of struggles such as that posed in Nicaragua where the the USFI's adaptation to Castroism criminally abandoned the fight for a revolutionary Trotskyist leadership.

A major conclusion of the book is the presentation of a programmatic perspective for the Political Revolution in, and defence of, the workers states. This programme addresses vital tactical and strategic problems such as are posed by the recent wars between degenerate Workers States by the events in Poland and by the new Cold War offensive. For all those fighting to build an international revolutionary leadership these are questions that put to the test and find wanting the method and conclusions of all the false claimants to Trotskyism. A final chapter examines the various analyses put forward by Pablo, Mandel, Hansen, Tim Wohlforth and others.

In Ireland the book was rejected by the book-shops of both Sinn Fein (exposing again their pretensions to "socialism") and the stalinist Workers Party. No more surprisingly, however, the self-styled Leninist-Trotskyists of the League for a Workers Republic, Peoples Democracy, Socialist Workers Movement and the Militant tendency made it an occasion to display their "seriousness" about theory, debate and revolutionary regroupment. A seminar organised by IWG in February extended to each of these tendencies the right to reply formally to the book and participate in debate on it. True to form not a single one of them even replied, not to speak of turn up! Apart from inviting the charge of sectarianism and philistinism these groups demonstrate their unwillingness and even inability to defend their own perspectives and programmes when challenged by a perspective that for the first time fundamentally analyses some of the key issues which led originally to their degeneration as international currents into centrism.

For their part, the LWR published a pamphlet on the crisis in Poland in which they attribute the

overthrow of capitalism in E. Europe to the fact that the capitalists left! Unable to look dialectically at stalinism their tradition has characterised it as counter-revolutionary 'through-and-through' and adapted to social democracy. In consequence their programme for political revolution in the stalinist states and Poland adapts to bourgeois democratic perspectives - free elections to parliament etc. Their abstractions give way in practice to opportunism on Poland. They attack (without naming!) those who make fraternal revolutionary criticisms of Solidarnosc and they defend forces such as the Polish KPN whose programmes consciously aim to restore capitalism!

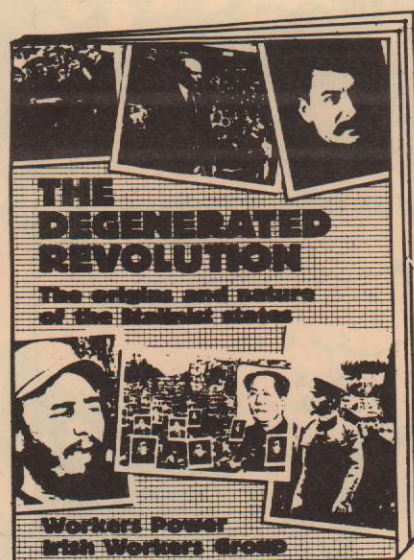
Needless to say, none of the Centrist publications has carried a review of "The Degenerated Revolution". Unfortunately the only review carried in an Irish 'left' journal, that of John Cane (ex-SWM) in GRALTON, is, to be kind, sub-political. Mr Kane declares that when confronted with these questions his dominating urge is to say "fuck the lot of them".

Workers Power and the IWG remain openly committed to debate on this book:

"We invite wide-ranging debate on our conclusions. For our part we will seek to use them in the class struggle. Our theory is revolutionary theory. Above all it is a guide to action. It is theory as described by Marx:

"Clearly the weapon of criticism cannot replace the criticism of weapons, and material force must be overthrown by material force. But theory also becomes a material force once it has gripped the masses".

Such theory can and must play its role in the struggle to rid the planet of all the Stalinist bureaucracies who have debased socialism, slaughtered millions, and today extend their doomed life only by accumulating endless contradictions which they are incapable of resolving, and which will inevitably devour them."



Copies of "The Degenerated Revolution" are now available, price £2 (plus 50p p & p).

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But the Fourth International never became the leadership of the proletariat on a significant scale. The war shattered its weak structures. The fascists, the imperialist Allies and the Kremlin's army of hired assassins murdered its finest cadres. The forces of the Fourth International remained marginal to the class struggle. Their banner, alas, was not taken up by millions. The problem of leadership remained unresolved, and capitalism gained a respite that, on a world scale, has lasted to this day. What is clear is that no Fourth International in the tradition of Leon Trotsky exists today.

In order to build an international revolutionary party, it is necessary to look clearly and carefully at the history of the Fourth International, to examine the origins and nature of its political and organisational collapse. But this book is not simply a history of the FI. History is necessary as a guide to understanding; understanding is a guide to action. This book also deals with the tasks that face genuine Trotskyists in fulfilling the goal that Trotsky set his followers - to resolve the crisis of leadership by building a World party of Socialist Revolution.

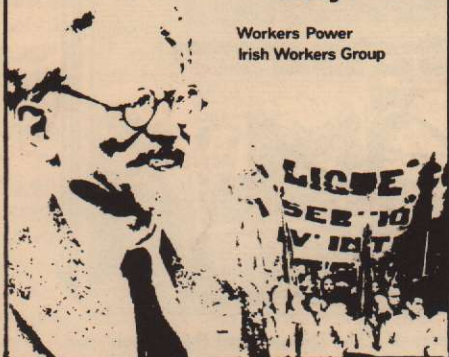
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